Social Studies Collection
No. 29

School Failure and Dropouts in Spain

Mariano Fernández Enguita
Luis Mena Martínez
Jaime Riviere Gómez

Obra Social
Fundación "la Caixa"

SOCIAL PROJECTS. THE SPIRIT OF ”LA CAIXA”.

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Presentation

The quality of a country's educational system is not only an indicator of its current levels of development and social wellbeing, but also that of its future. It is not surprising that providing a universal education which is capable of stimulating the integral development of children and adolescents is also a strategic objective of great importance in the most advanced nations.

Our country is not distant from concerns regarding education. It is for this reason that the education of our children and, in concrete, the problem of failure at school have become recurring objects of public debate.

Today the school finds itself facing the challenge of responding to demands which reflect the society we live in. A globalized, highly competitive, changing and increasingly complex world demands professionals open to continual education, capable of innovating and adapting to innovations and to managing themselves with ease in an environment very different from what it was just a few decades ago.

But education is not only an economic issue. On the contrary, the civic dimension of education has constituted, since its origin, the core of all democratic systems. The school effectively educates and trains professionals, but above all, citizens who can participate consciously and actively in the progress of the community to which they belong.

As a result of the importance of education, school failure is currently considered a major problem, particularly here in Spain where the rate of failure is above the European and OECD averages. The importance of this issue has, during recent years, led to the appearance of numerous analyses and diverse studies

that have tried to understand its causes and to establish the real reach of school failure and dropping out in our country.

This study looks at this problematic from a new perspective: instead of offering an image of the Spanish situation, it projects a film which explains the process that leads to failure. Of course it addresses issues such as social origin, gender, ethnicity, nationality and family situation to the extent that they impact on the performance of students in school. But in addition to establishing the relationship between factors and results, this book demonstrates the common dynamic characteristics that are found in the trajectories of young people who do not complete their compulsory education.

With this volume in the Social Studies collection, ”la Caixa” Social Projects intends to contribute to reflections on school failure and dropping out, one of the most serious challenges faced by our educational system, as it places the adaptation to adult life of many of our young people at risk and hinders the growth and future wellbeing of our society.

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”la Caixa” Social Projects and
Chief ExecutiveOfficer of the
”la Caixa” Foundation

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Introduction

School failure is a well-known problem in Spain, studied both by the institutions facing it as well as by academics from diverse disciplines. This book is not an attempt to collect what has already been done, but rather to advance our understanding of school failure and students who drop out.

In order to do so, we begin by presenting school failure as a problem, trying to clarify what it is and how in practice it is dichotomously defined, thereby reducing the multiple differences among students to a binary division: that of success or failure.

The size of the problem is reflected in available official figures, which are presented and analyzed in the second chapter. Following a systematic approach, the analysis procedes from primary school through post compulsory secondary education, recognizing the crucial role of compulsory secondary education but without reducing the information compiled to only this period.

Failure in school is not evenly distributed throughout Spanish society. Therefore, in the third chapter, based on an analysis of various preexisting databases and in order to provide a complete overview of the situation we will look at the influence of social origin, gender, ethnicity, nationality and family situation on the process of dropping out of school.

The fourth chapter focuses on the situation of those who have already dropped out of school, analyzing their trajectory and specific educational circumstances. Repetition of academic years, academic results obtained, the use and impact of diversification methods, disciplinary problems and absenteeism are all addressed and analyzed in this chapter.

In the fifth chapter we analyze how those who have recently dropped out of school understand their situation. We look at the perception of dropping out of school as a form of transition to adulthood, where the image of work vs. the value of studying is a key issue. We also look at students' academic aspirations and expectations and how these are constructed among those who end up failing in school. A fundamental question is how those who drop out experience their schooling, including the image they have of the institution and the educational system. Finally we analyze the reasons school principals and guidance counselors give for school failure.

The final chapter summarizes the main results and offers an interpretation and some final reflections on the problem. In this chapter we attempt to show the range of dimensions which must be addressed in order to explain school failure. Therefore, we deal with educational institutions in the context of the information society and with social divisions related to school failure. But we also look at the internal dynamics and tools of the educational system: the role of guidance that privileges the academic option over the vocational, diversification measures which divide students, the results of repetition and the consequences of changing schools between primary and secondary school with the attendant redefinition of the function of the faculty. The point is to look at what is behind the dichotomy between success and failure, with failure understood as the result of a process in which adolescents become disengaged or disconnected from school.

I. The problem of failure and dropping out of school

When did school failure become a concern? It was not a concern half a century ago when it was considered normal for many children and adolescents to be rejected by the educational system. At that time primary education was universal but it did not seem strange to anyone that thousands of students left primary school to begin to work, in the case of women to do domestic work and for men to work in agriculture or industry. Until the passage of the General Education Law of 1970 (LGE), to be able to enter the *elementary baccalaureate* (10 to 14 years of age) it was necessary to pass an *entrance* exam, a term that made it very clear that the student was still considered to be *outside* of the school system (in terms of secondary and university education). This was because there was not one system but rather two: one formed by primary school and on-the-job training in a trade or skill, perhaps with the extra step of some sort of formal vocational training (this «system» being the only one available for workers and the majority of the population), and a second one, consisting of the baccalaureate and higher education, charged with the task of filling public and private bureaucracies and the professions. This dual system was not exclusive to the Spanish system alone, but rather was widespread and as a result, was reflected in the dualism of terminology in the world of education: instruction and teaching, teachers and professors, pupils and students. There was, on the one hand, primary education for all, which, although not everyone would complete it, was at least in everyone's reach (if there were enough places, of course). And on the other hand, there was academic secondary and higher education, which was only for the privileged few.

Comprehensive reforms of the educational system gradually changed this situation, with all students studying a common core of subjects until the end of compulsory education, generally at 15 or 16 years of age. These reforms

were made based on the conviction that from the point of view of individuals, it was premature and unfair to determine which track each person must follow at the beginning of adolescence, and therefore, his or her work and social opportunities. Moreover, from the point of view of society, excluding so many people from further education— including perhaps many people who were capable but unfortunately limited by a less stimulating intellectual environment—was a waste of talent and human capital.

There was growing political pressure to extend access to education to the whole population, and by so doing, access to the presumed benefits of this education. There was also a growing economic conviction that a country's human capital is of equal or greater importance to development and competition than physical or economic capital. However, with reform there was also the realization that the task would not be easy, and that not only might *those to be expected* fall along the way but in fact anyone might, including children of the social classes with higher educational expectations and aspirations, in particular among technicians and white-collar workers, the old petty-bourgeoisie, the capitalist class and even, to a lesser extent, among the professional-managerial class. Emmanuel Todd (1998:199-200) wrote at the close of the twentieth century: «The pleasant surprise regarding the years 1500 to 1900 is to note that writing, the magical instrument of priests in their origin, was in fact accessible to all. The painful revelation of the years 1950 to 1990 is to note that secondary or higher education cannot be extended equally to all of the population.» Without going so far, it is enough to point out that the extension of secondary education has turned out to be a complex and herculean task and that difficulties are experienced not only by the working class but also to a great and increasing extent by the middle class. This is why school failure has gone from being a given, accepted by everyone, to being a cause for social alarm.

1.1. Why be concerned about failure

Why be concerned about failure? Because, among other reasons, we have entered and are entering into the information society and knowledge economy: «have entered» in the sense that its effects are already apparent in the lives of everyone and even more so in the lives of young people; and «are entering» implying that the process has only just begun. The first of these effects, which

can be easily verified, is that individual's social opportunities increasingly depend on skills, human capital, and the capacity to obtain, maintain and interpret information and to employ and acquire knowledge. Of course, these capacities are simultaneously influenced by other older and perhaps less appealing factors, such as property, income, gender, race, physical constitution, and nationality. But the news (good and/or bad) is that individual, family and group strategies of mobility and social reproduction increasingly depend on education. The growing economic importance of information and knowledge is manifested in the growing distance between the book value and market value of companies (Edvinson and Malone, 1997; Roos, Dragonetti and Edvinson, 2001), in the increase in income inequality associated with differences in educational level (San Segundo, 1997; Baum and Payea, 2005) and in the renewed importance that public authorities are giving to education.

A gap has appeared between skilled and unskilled work. This is characteristic of the third great industrial revolution, whose motor is the utilization of information and knowledge on a grand scale within the economic system, as was the factory and the new scale of the means of production for the first industrial revolution and the organization of work propelled by Taylorism, Fordism and the Stakhanovite movement for the second. And just as the first caused a major and new social division based on property and the second based on authority, this third revolution is doing so based on qualifications (Fernández Enguita, 2000). The access to and the capacity to utilize and exchange information and knowledge is once again separating the haves from the have nots, who in this case, need not be dispossessed, as knowledge is not held like a natural inheritance, like work or a craft was, nor is it a historical inheritance, as once land was. Moreover, up until now we do not even have a shared terminology to refer to this social division. Hence, we speak interchangeably of skilled and unskilled workers, specialists and non-specialists, symbolic and ordinary analysts (Reich, 1991), the info-rich and info-poor (McClure, 1995), self-programmable and generic labour (Castells and Esping-Andersen, 1999).

This division is worsened because it is no longer limited to a national level in which public policy can, first of all, educate future workers to prepare them to work in skilled jobs in a relatively egalitarian way by guaranteeing basic education and equal opportunity for all within a unified educational system, and, second of all, offset the effects of inequality through social protection and

redistribution of income and resources. Now the division exists in a global context in which millions of workers with equal skills are willing to carry out the same tasks for less pay and millions of other less skilled workers are willing to work for even less if they can.

Today workers in developed countries must compete for their jobs with the products of mechanization, automation, and computerization, which are capable of carrying out much of the work of managing information that was previously done by humans and doing so at a much lower cost and with greater consistency and precision. They must also compete with workers in the rest of the world, who are willing to do the same jobs in their own countries or anywhere for lower salaries. Work, under capitalism, is a commodity and even though it is not only this, as with any other commodity it competes based on price and quality. Workers in the developed world have inevitably lost the battle related to price. However, regarding quality everything depends on qualifications; in other words, on the capacity to process information and manage knowledge in a way that still cannot be done by machines or workers in the developing world. In short, everything depends on their qualifications and consequently, their formal education and success in school.

In addition, the global and information society is also a reflexive society in transformation, one which is constantly reconsidering and reconstructing itself and obligated, paradoxically, to make change a pillar of stability. It is said that capitalism is like a bicycle; it can maintain its balance only if it keeps moving. Nations and people also need to advance to maintain their position in the social and international structure. With respect to knowledge, this means that the information society is also the learning society.

European governments understood this and took on the challenge, albeit perhaps with an excess of rhetoric and optimism, when in the year 2000 in Lisbon they made the commitment to ensure lifelong learning for all. The educational system must equip everyone not just with information and knowledge to be used throughout an active life, but it must also make it possible to continue learning throughout life through a number of ways ranging from self-learning to returning to the classroom and through continuing education and occupational training. However, this increased importance of knowledge makes its distribution and redistribution difficult. In simple terms, if in our life path we are, for example, in school from 6 to 20 years of age and then applying

what we have learned from 21 to 65 years of age, this then implies that a quarter of our lives is dedicated to learning and three quarters to applying what is learned (leaving out the first and last years as unproductive years). From the perspective of education, this also implies a limited obective which, if not achieved the first time may well be achieved in subsequent opportunities. This is the idea of lifelong learning as a means of providing a *second chance*, as a remedy for school failure. However, in a learning society when the individual who has failed is trying again to complete his/her education, the individual who has been successful is not there waiting for him or her to catch up, but rather is already moving on to the next stage. No matter how many corrections and subtleties you introduce related to the distribution in life of education and work or over the equivalence (or non-equivalence) between initial training received in school-age years and later training or the *second chance*, you are still left with the same essential mechanism: who ever leaves the race will have enormous difficulty in getting back into it and will probably remain outside the winner's circle. Those who obtain the most out of their initial education will have access to more enriching employment opportunities (in terms of qualifications and personal development, in addition to salary, working conditions, etc.) and will have more and greater opportunities for training later on, whether in the workplace, returning to the classroom or through their own means. In contrast, those who do not take advantage of their initial education or who are not able to benefit from it will be more likely to end up unemployed or having unskilled jobs in which there is little to learn and less opportunity to have access to and take advantage of training later on. In this sense, the information and knowledge society, in particular in regards to work and qualifications, promises a dynamic spiral in which those who begin well will contine to do better and viceversa; in other words, it is a *logical* version of the so-called *Matthew effect*: «For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.»[1]

All of this gives the question of success or failure at school great importance. What was promised to be a meritocratic utopia (the thread leading from Plato's Republic to the post-industrial society of Daniel Bell) may also become an *aristocratic nightmare* in which those who are better endowed genetically and

(1) The parable of the talents, in Mathew 25: 14-30.

culturally, that is, those *born into the right family*, will have all the advantages and accumulated advantages in the race for knowledge and through this, in the competition for social benefits. In fact, redistributing knowledge is much more difficult than redistributing authority or property, even though it is politically less conflictive. Confronting school failure is no longer simply about combating inequality in one aspect of life, in the access to one good, but rather it is combating inequality in the access to the key resource in the social structure and the distribution of individual opportunities in life, hence, its centrality.

1.2. What is school failure?

The term *school failure* has repeatedly been the object of discussion for two reasons. First, because of its denotative value, as it is difficult to define it clearly. For some school failure means not finishing Compulsory Secondary Education (Educación Secundaria Obligatoria or ESO) while for others, it is not completing post-compulsory secondary education. For others it would include any kind of failure, repetition or delay in finishing school; in other words, partial failures that could be the sign of a difficult road ahead to achieve success. The second reason is because of its connotative value. It leads to disqualification and even to the student being stigmatized and blamed, in turn freeing the educational institution of responsibility.

In its most restrictive form, *school failure* is the situation of the student who, in trying to achieve the minimum objectives set forth by the institution—those of compulsory education—fails in doing so and withdraws after having been categorized as a failure; in short, after being *failed*, receiving *certification* of attendance instead of graduating, depending on the terminology employed under the legislation of the moment or the cultural context. In the case of Spain, the student who is not able to finish ESO and receive the *graduation* diploma, gets a *certificate* for having completed ESO but without having passed it. Note that in this case, those that drop out and do not even try to finish the ESO do not fit into these categories as there is no failure since they drop out of school; nevertheless, they are usually included in figures for school failure.[2] Those who begin but do not complete the baccalaureate (bachillerato)

(2) For example, in the reliable work of Muñoz del Bustillo *et al* (2008).

or intermediate vocational training (Cursos Formativos de Grado Medio) are not usually included in the figures for school failure in spite of the fact that they do literally fail, but they are included in the figures for those that drop out.

A less restrictive version would include those who, having tried, *fail* in any of the compulsory levels, compulsory secondary eduction or in post-compulsory education; that is, in ESO as well as in intermediate vocational training or the baccalaureate. In this case the fundamental variable is who makes the final decision: is it the institution that decides that the student cannot continue, or is it the student (or his or her family) that makes the decision? From this perspective, we could say that in the case of the former, there is a *selection* of students and in the latter, a *choice* made by students (Field *et al*., 2007: 147).

Note that in all cases *trying* simply means attending class—more or less, not exceeding the level of absenteeism that would constitute *dropping out* of school. On the other hand, repeating grades (the limit in Spain is up to three in primary school, two in compulsory secondary and unlimited in post-compulsory) would not be incompatible with the successful completion of studies; successful in terms of *efficacy*, the student having finished against all odds but failure in terms of *efficiency*, as the ratio between means and ends is out of proportion.

On the other hand, it cannot be ignored that a broader concept of *failure* could include many types of trajectories and situations that are normally not included; for example, receiving a diploma after a number of repetitions and much later than normal or low test scores on standardized tests of ability and knowledge, independent of formal school success (obtaining the diploma).

Any more or less restrictive conception of *failure* places a significant number of students in the group of *dropouts*. In the broader sense, dropping out would be the case for all students between 18 and 24 who have not completed some form of formal and regular post-compulsory secondary education, which in the case of Spain would be the baccalaureate or the intermediate vocational training or their former equivalents, BUP (Bachillerato Unificado Polivalente - General Unified Baccalaureate), Bachillerato Superior and FPI (Vocational Training program). Here we employ the ISCED[3] (International Standard Classification of Education) re-definition of level three that Eurostat

(3) International Standard Classification of Education established by UNESCO and accepted as the standard for international comparisons. For our purposes, the levels that are important are: 0, pre-primary; 1, primary; 2, compulsory secondary; and 3, the second cycle of secondary education or post-compulsory.

(Statistical Office of the European Communities) made, starting in 2005. In order to be consistent with this, we do not consider as post-compulsory levels those classified as ISCED 3c,[4] which consist of a training of fewer than two years duration and that do not permit access to a higher educational level, therefore the following programs are excluded: Social Guarantee courses, workshop schools, craft centres, employment workshops and Programmes for Initial Professional Qualification.

In general, any student who, not having obtained the mentioned post-compulsory diplomas or certificates, withdraws from ISCED levels 1, 2 or 3 A and 3 B (in Spain, from Compulsory Secondary Education/ESO, the baccalaureate or intermediate vocational training) is considered to have dropped out. Therefore, included in this category are those students who finish ESO, even successfully, but who do not enrol in the baccalaureate or intermediate vocational training; it cannot be said that they have dropped out of a stage in which they they were never enrolled, but they are considered to have dropped out of the educational system. Also included are those who continue in the educational system in programs classified as ISCED 3c; that is to say, employment preparation programmes, even in cases in which they remain in said programmes beyond the age of compulsory education and for the same amount of time that they would have, had they been in the second cycle of secondary education.

In a certain sense, somewhat more restrictive cases of early school abandonment are those cases in which the above conditions are fulfilled and therefore cannot be classified as failure. For example, this would include those who have successfully completed ESO; in other words, those who could have finished or could have enrolled in some type of post-compulsory secondary education (ISCED 3a or 3b) but have not done so and are not doing so.

Even a seemingly simple administrative definition poses problems. Looking at it statistically, the cases of Early School Leaving (ESL) are those who have not completed the upper secondary level, and its incidence can be calculated with respect to an age cohort (those born in year X) or school cohort (those who began ESO in the year Y, for example), with respect to those enrolled the

(4) These are the programmes that do not give access to those of level 5 (the first stage of tertiary or higher education) but rather to the labour market, to other level 3 programmes and to level 4 programmes (post-secondary non-tertiary education).

year before or with respect to an age-group (for example, the typical age group from 18-24, or the total adult population).

Looking at it through census figures, among other things, problems arise with students who change from one school to another or from one programme to another, becoming those chronically absent students who are still enrolled, that *mysterious figure* representing students that simply cannot be found. In addition, the exclusion of the ISCED 3c programmes is also a problem, reluctantly assumed by some administrations; it is not by chance that in Spain the concept of Early Abandonment of Education (Abandono Educativo Temprano/AET) is often used, defined as leaving «education-training.» It is an alternative to premature abandonment of school, based on leaving *education* rather than dropping out of *school*. This then makes it possible not to include in the figures those who participate in some other form of training. And the word *early* instead of *premature* could be a form of *political correctness*, or in other words, an attempt to not use any potentially hurtful terminology. In particular it is worth pointing out that especially at the end of compulsory education there are many situations that can technically be classfied as absenteeism, given that although students continue to be enrolled, they have in fact left school, rarely or never attending class.

Consequently, on what basis can we classify in the same way leaving the educational system when the student is still within the compulsory school age (under 16 years of age), when the student is past the compulsory school age but still under legal age (16 or 17 years of age), and when the student is already an adult (over 18 years of age) (Glasman, 2003:10)? In a strict sense, if dropping out is defined as a choice, then only the third group can be categorized as having made such a choice. In the second case, the decision would be up to the family or the guardian of the minor, but not the minor's decision, even if he or she wanted very much to drop out. In the first case, it would simply be a case of the institution abandoning the student, no matter what the attitude of the student or his or her family.

Moreover, it is obvious that de facto abandonment or dropping out (chronic absenteeism) usually leads to failure, and that failure, in turn, can lead to absenteeism and dropping out. The fact that repeated absenteeism is almost always the prelude (although not the only one) to failure is well-known by teachers and guidance counselors. Perhaps the fact that dropping out of school

may simply be the consequence of failure or its anticipation is not often taken into account (Rué, 2003). Take the case of a student who leaves ESO without graduating and who does not enrol in any other programme, not even in a ISCED 3c type of training; it is likely that this happens because the student does not expect to be successful in any of these programmes and does not want to fail again. The student who drops out of ESO or post-compulsory secondary education in the middle or at the end of an academic year, perhaps without even taking some of the exams, probably does so because he or she is expecting to fail and prefers to avoid the pain or the work involved in dealing with this. The student who leaves during whatever level in school having failed (without completing ESO or without a diploma in the post-compulsory levels) but with the possibility of trying again by repeating the year, makes this choice to fail by deciding to drop out.

In fact, when the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and other authorities qualify as premature abandonment of school the cases of all young people over eighteen years of age who have not obtained some type of ISCED 3a or 3b post-compulsory secondary education diploma or certificate (the baccalaureate or intermediate vocational training in Spain), or who are not studying to obtain one, they are including all of the cases of school failure from previous stages in the educational system, even those which refer to individuals that do not consider themselves as having dropped out or failed.

In reality, emphasizing one term or another reveals a lot about how each society understands its educational system. It is interesting to note how the term *failure* is widely used in Europe, where the problem of dropping out, and especially dropping out before completing a post-compulsory program, has become an important issue in recent years; while in the United States, they talk about school dropouts but rarely mention failure. We could hypothesize that it makes sense to be concerned about school dropouts in a less traditional, less classist society, in a real or supposedly *open* society, whose educational system allows everyone to remain in the educational system for a long time through a plurality of paths and opportunities, as in the American *high school*, in which all students are expected to remain until 18 years of age, albeit through different programs and curriculums. In contrast, there is more concern about *failure* in societies such as those of Europe, which still have educational systems in which students are segregated, divided into clear and distinct tracks before the

end of compulsory education, and where comprehensive reforms have been made but in the midst of great debate on their adequacy, particularly regarding their impact on the possibility of the whole adolescent population following the same program of study throughout the years of compulsory education. A system which is not very selective like the American one, or one which is decidedly selective but with a varied curriculum for everyone like the German one, is more concerned about dropouts because it offers several variants for success, in everyone's reach. A selective educational system with the same curriculum for everyone, like the French or Spanish systems, is concerned about failure since these systems offer only one form of success, and it is doubtful that it is in everyone's reach. A selective system with a curriculum aimed at only the few, like the old Spanish or French systems, worried about students *lagging* or *falling behind* because the ability of only a few to be successful was assumed.(5)

As we will argue later on, a broad analysis of success in school should be concerned not only with those who end up outside of the school system without having obtained the required results –whether due to dropping out, not continuing their studies at a higher level, screening or a lack of places– and those who remain in school but fail, but also with those who remain and successfully finish but with a high cost in terms of time and effort (failure in the sense of inefficiency) and even with those who finish on time and with normal effort (or with less than normal effort), but with the only thing tying them to the institution and its proclaimed ends being its extrinsic reward (failure as demotivating).

At the moment, however, we have opted for a conception of failure that simply includes all forms of not achieving the educational objectives championed by society and that can be considered to be minimal requirements for integration into the labour market, namely, a post-compulsory diploma or certificate. This broad definition means that not only are there the objectives of the individual, which may or may not be reached (success or failure), but there are also societal objectives which are not met when the individual does not achieve his or her objectives (whether as a consequence of a selection made on the part of the institution or a choice made on the part of the individual). We also include,

(5) On the old understanding of this theme, now not given great importance, see Ravon, 2000.

therefore, those who have reached legal age and have obtained the corrsponding minimal diploma or certificate but who choose not to continue their education or are constrained from doing so for whatever reason. In this sense, the sphere of school failure becomes coextensive with that of early school leavers or dropouts, and its definition becomes problematic and ambiguous (How can you fail something that you do not even do?), but less so than the definition of dropping out (How can it be labelled dropping out if you you were never enrolled or if you were expelled?) We will say that every time an individual does not achieve the educational objectives that the economy and society demand and consider to be minimally adequate, although not compulsory, we have a failure of the individual, the society and the institution in charge of mediating between the two to achieve this objective; in the same way that unemployment can be considered to be both an individual and societal failure, even though having a job is not an obligation.

1.3. From small differences to great inequality

The objectives proclaimed by educational institutions –job training, civic education, personal development, etc.– appear to make our conventional notions of educational success or failure a reflection of a global evaluation of each actor, based on a fair and efficient distribution of social opportunities. In the academic world, this was and is the supposition of structural functionalism (Davis and Moore, 1972), which is based on the legacy of Durkheim and on transposing the economic postulates of classic market theory to sociology and which would find its ultímate expression in the theory of human capital (Schultz, 1972). In common parlance this means that the verdict about schools, which is expressed in the dichotomy between success and failure or in a non-binary/dualistic form in the different degrees of success or failure, offers a balanced evaluation of the individual capacities of the individuals that can and must serve as the basis of the social division of work–horizontal division by professions or specialities–and social stratification–vertical, hierarchical division by status levels. Through the school selection process, as the theory goes, society is able to choose the most capable and motivated people to carry out the most complex and important tasks.

It is certain that cultural or educational capital cannot be bought or given, that it cannot be acquired except through effort, like economic capital (assuming one has the personal means to acquire it), nor can it be given by others, as with political or social capital (assuming they have the power to do so); rather it is the result of long individual effort in an adequate institutional context, impossible without either of these two things. The laborious character of acquiring educational capital and its relationship to personal effort make it at first appear to be a more just and less circumstantial basis for differentiation and social hierarchy; effort has social prestige in contrast to class privilege. But this does not necessarily make it fair, or even effective. Other forms of knowledge, and there are many, do not divide society in the way educational capital does, nor do they have the same consequences. The ability to drive a car, for example, may be easier for some than for others, but in the end, all who attempt it can accomplish it. The ability to play an instrument, on the opposite end, is something that the majority of people do not even try and many who do so, do not reach an aceptable level, creating a huge divide between accomplished musicians and the rest. Nevertheless, this division does not have significant consequences on the lives of the vast majority, even though it might among the limited number of professional musicians. In contrast, the difference related to knowledge acquired in school translates into a clear division, as in the case of music, but imposible to overcome by mere insistence, as with driving. These differences radically divide the population and have consequences equally radical for individuals' future lives. This is precisely what we need to consider.

We may begin by pointing out that the educational system's criteria for judgement is not very accurate. Everyone is divided into two groups –those who succeed and those who fail–, as if everything were either black or white, and although this is done based on arithmetical measurement (grades and test scores) that give the appearance of precision, the evaluation criteria that teachers and schools use have been shown to be extremely inconsistent and therefore questionable (Barlow, 003) Illustrative of this is the *halo effect* (Thorndike, 1920): the tendency to give a positive evaluation to all aspects of a person due to a positive evaluation of one aspect; for example, to give a better evaluation to the school work of a student who is more articulate, or whose behaviour is more conformist or who is more physically attractive.

Another example of questionable evaluation practices is the *Pygmalion effect* (Rosenthal and Jakobson, 1968): the tendency to confirm and reinforce the teacher's first impressions of a student throughout subsequent interactions. It has been demonstrated that the same exercise or task can be evaluted in very different ways by different teachers and even by the same teacher in different moments (Le Clerc et al, 2004) and that replacing teachers' evaluations with national standardized tests yields very different results in the distribution of failures and repetitions (Grisay, 1982, 1984, 1986). It is not on a whim or just by chance that students ask teachers above all for clarity in evaluation criteria, predictability and certainty, even before changes in the curriculum or in teaching methods. In the classroom, just as in society in general, as important or more important than the content of justice, as explained by Max Weber, is the *certainty of the law*, which marks the superiority of modern law over *kadi justice*.

School judgement tends to be biased judgement. The advantages associated with the middle class and ethnic majority regarding educational capital (Perrenoud, 1990), educational habits (Bourdieu, 1990), the use of formal language (Bernstein, 1971), familiarity with teachers' expectations (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964) and the disposition to enter into the evaluation game (Labov, 1972) are now a commonplace notion about which there is no need to argue.

But what we do wish to explore here is the arbitrary nature of failure, its magnitude and its consequences. The peculiarity of the educational system, as was pointed out by Baudelot and Establet (1976), is how it simultaneously produces geniuses and imbeciles. This is inherent in the very fact of establishing a rule and proclaiming it as a dividing line. But how did we arrive at a 30 percent failure rate? Is this percentage too high or is it somehow natural? The media, in order to make it news, believes it is the former, and less-seasoned observers of education easily fall into this trap, but the most likely is that it is the latter. Because how is it determined how much a student must know in order to pass a subject or a course? At first we might think this is determined by the legislator, the design of the curriculum, the educational authorities, the principals and teachers of the school, and each of them can assume it has been decided by others, that in reality he or she lacks autonomy in an environment with tight constraints. However, the truth is that this is a game in which all are bound, conditioned, limited and influenced by one another, implicitly

negotiating the final results. Thus, once this is accepted, the question remains: with what criteria and scale do we evaluate?

There is no predetermined amount of knowledge or absolute criteria to determine what a student must learn. It is not impossible to determine what a person must know in order to work at age 16, enter the military at 17 or vote at 18; in order to be able to carry out certain tasks, a series of competencies can be established, but in reality it does not work like this. There are no general levels of competency established for being a worker, a soldier or a citizen, nor are there specific determined competencies for being a lathe operator or gardener. What is done is something completely different; what general competencies must the average young person acquire to be able to work, to be a citizen, to be in the military, or a mechanic or gardener? Time is the independent variable, knowledge, the dependent variable. How much knowledge then? This is where the perverse mechanism emerges because lacking explicit criteria, the institution and its agents are guided by the pretense of normality. The appropriate amount of knowledge is that for which the results of the students show a normal distribution. This is what has been called the *posthumous effect*, which De Landsheere (1992: 242) defined as: «A teacher's tendency to adjust the level of their teaching to their assessment of student performance, so as to maintain approximately the same Gaussian distribution of marks from year to year.» This *bell curve* is the distribution that is expected to occur for the majority of human charateristics in a large population: a majority of medium height and a few very tall or very short, etc. Technically speaking, it is a distribution in which approximately 60 percent will fall within 1 standard deviation of the mean (above or below) and approximately 96 percent will fall within 2 standard deviations of the mean. Psychologists consciously validate their tests this way, modifying them until the results achieve a normal distribution expected for pyschological characteristics or mental capacities, and the teacher does this unconsciously, only becoming alarmed if there is a concentration at the two extremes of success or failure.

Following this, the specific culture of the discipline, the atmosphere of the school, the specific group of students, the teacher's own inclinations, the spirit of the times or whatever event that has occurred beforehand will make the curve move a little bit in one direction or another: resulting in more or less platy- and leptokurtic distributions (more or less concentrated around the

mean), which lean to the left or the right (with greater or fewer values above or below the mean) with the cut-off mark established before or after the distance of one standard deviation. Experimental and social sciences do not produce different proportions of passes and fails because of greater or lesser difficulty since as we have already said, there are no absolute criteria, but rather there are X number of hours for an adequate amount of learning in order to produce a normal distribution. However, it is possible that influenced by the content of their respective subjects, the history teacher thinks that above all he is shaping citizens and in this way adapts himself to an egalitarian perspective, according to which he should pass more students, while the physics and chemistry teachers think they are forming producers and therefore tend toward a hiererchical perspective in which it seems more logical that there would be many more students at the bottom than at the top.

The real problem arises, however, by turning a continuum based on a plurality of differences into a dichotomy, and this, in turn, into a social divide. Students do not come from equally stimulating circumstances; they have different abilities; they feel more or less attracted to and identified with the institution; they bring with them different levels of prior knowledge and they go through very different situations and circumstances, yet schools evaluate all of them in the same way. The school proclaims, as Bordieu said, «indifference to differences» (1966). It is true that all of the rhetoric in education today revolves around the recognition of diversity, as it did and continues to do so around the goal of equality, but it barely goes beyond rhetoric: there is a certain tolerance towards cultural peculiarities and some compensatory measures which are in general not very effective. The school was born as a unifying and standardizing institution and continues to be that. Its indifference in relation to differences translates social inequality into educational inequality and transforms diversity into inequality.

The school is *procrustean*[6] which is the opposite of ergonomic. It is the student who must adapt him or herself to its norms in terms of objectives, methods and rhythms, and not in any way does the school adapt to the students needs. This conviction can be seen in the trend toward reducing time in school: first of all in relation to the teachers' schedules and therefore teaching hours, accompanied

(6) Procrustes (*the stretcher*) invited his guests to sleep on his bed and amputed their excess length if they were too tall, or he stretched them if they were too short. He was also known as Damastes (*the subduer*).

at times by the generous suggestion that schools should be open twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. This can also be seen in the evaluation or grading of students, which can be refined endlessly; one can fail for one tenth, one hundredth or a thousandth of a point, and there is no way to get even one hour of extra help for the student with difficulties. This is all made worse because it happens under pressure, such as when the person trying to pass the driver's test has to repeat because of one unexpected mistake, insufficient preparation, or a bit of awkwardness in maneuvering. Everything in school happens with the kind of pressure that assures the already mentioned normal distribution as criteria, which, of course, does nothing more than ultimately guarantee an aceptable ratio of success and failure.

And then, that small difference in grades or test scores is transformed into a radical division: passing or not passing, success or failure, and each of these divisions divides into two or three crucial junctions for further opportunities in the life of a student: to continue studying or to begin working, to continue the academic track or the vocational training track, to go to university or not. Schools are not very likely to diversify in their work in terms of quality—treating different students in different ways—or in terms of quantity—more for those who have less or each according to his or her needs. On the other hand, they are very willing to diversify, that is, structurally segregate their public. In this way, small differences due to any type of factor result in major inequalities in terms of opportunities. «Above all [the teacher] must be the agent of bringing about and legitimizing differentiation of the school class on an achievement axis» (Parsons, 1976:56).

Paradoxically, afterwards there is never a shortage of those who come to discover that behind this dichotomy of success and failure is a continuum of differences and varieties in terms of performance. The Ministry of Education has decided to abolish zero as a grade, arguing that it is imposible that a student has learned nothing, in spite of the fact that it is possible, that that is not what the zero means, that a one does not mean anything different and that the measure is, at least, picturesque. One proposal is to substitute the simple notion of failure with zones of vulnerability (Escudero, 2005). *Students at risk* (Navarette, 2007), or elaborate *qualitative* definitions of failure are proposed that in the end can be summed up in either passing or failing ESO (Marchesi, 2003; Salas, 2004). But what in fact is needed is to not have gotten to the point that we are in.

II. The Long Road to Failure

Although today social concern related to school failure is focused on ESO, which in the professional and popular imagination has now become the setting for all the problems, what is certain is that there are indicators of school failure at earlier stages that merit our attention.

It must be recognized that early childhood education has undergone a spectacular growth in recent years, with enrolment rates reaching almost 100 percent. Nevertheless, there are still pockets where children are not in school and this may include the more disadvantaged sectors of the population. Table 2.1 shows net rates of school attendance from the ages of 1-5;[1] this

TABLE 2.1

Net enrollment rates by age and level/programme

Academic year 2006-2007. In percentages

	TOTAL	PRE-SCHOOL	PRIMARY	SPECIAL ED.
Under 1 year old	**4.9**	4.9	–	
One year old	**17.3**	17.3	–	0.0
Two years old	**32.6**	32.5	–	0.0
Three years old	**96.8**	96.7	–	0.1
Four years old	**98.4**	98.2	–	0.2
Five years old	**97.8**	97.4	0.3	0.2

Source: Las Cifras de la Educación en España 2009. Publication of the Ministry of Education. Statistics and indicators and elaboration by authors.

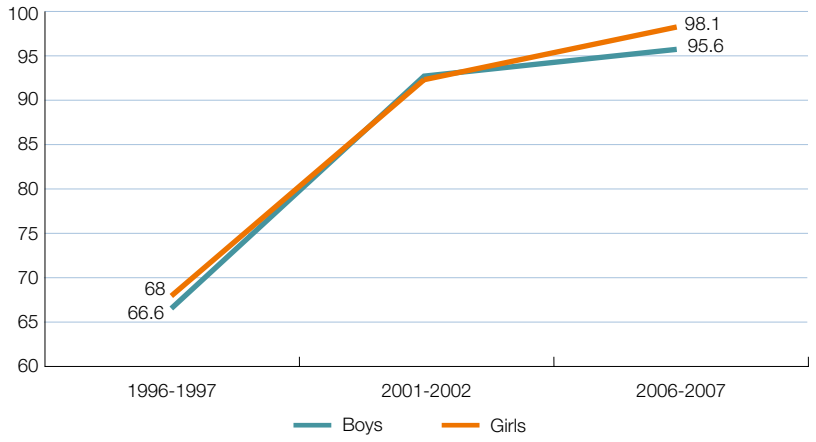
(1) The *net school enrollment* rate is the relationship between the number of students at each level and age group and the population of that age group. The theoretical early childhood education age groups are: in the first cycle, 0-2 years old and in the second cycle, 3-5 years old.

corresponds to nursery schools and early childhood education (1-5 years old). Graph 2.1 shows the net rates of school attendance for three year olds by sex and by year from the decade 1996-2007. These rates, which reach 97 percent of the three year old population, allow us to talk about universal schooling and to celebrate this achievement, particularly given the expansion in the number of public school places. However, we cannot hide the inequality that exists in terms of quality.

GRAPH 2.1

Net enrollment rates by sex at 3 years of age

In percentages



Source: Las Cifras de la Educación en España 2009, and author elaboration.

There is no evidence to claim that early childhood education is necessary or positive for all children, but it does seem reasonable to assume that it is so for those children from socially, economically or culturally disadvantaged groups, such as ethnic minorities, marginalized sectors, recently arrived immigrants and dysfunctional families. Among the 3 percent of three year olds not in school there is no doubt a large unknown proportion from families who, not for economic reasons, have decided not to put their young children in school. It would only be blind educational *imperialism* that would impose compulsory education for this age group. However, along with these families there are no doubt families whose children do not attend school because there are no pre-school facilities

where they live or because of the irregularity of their living conditions or for lack of awareness or information. In addition, there are some who not only do not make it into early childhood education but also start primary school late. All of this is a reason to strengthen the *compulsory supply* which means creating, financing and having enough places for all those who apply for them as well as providing information and improving the quality of service.

2.1. Primary school: it all begins here

School attendance in primary education has already reached 100 percent except for the low *frictional deschooling* in the case of newly-arrived immigrants, non-sedentary itinerant groups and exceptional family situations. Moreover, it is, by definition, a level of education that all students will pass. Nevertheless, it is at this level that the first indicators of failure begin to manifest; included among these are repetition and falling behind. Although falling behind in school is primarily caused by repetition, it may also have its origin in late enrollment or a disruption in schooling due to causes not related to schooling. These, however, are the exceptions. A student who falls behind in primary school has little chance of catching up in secondary school (although it isn't impossible, it can practically be ruled out). What is most likely is that said student will fall farther behind in this stage (although it does not have to be this way, nor will he or she be the only one), but in the study we do not have data to verify this.

Table 2.2 shows rates of repetition by sex and by two-year cycle in primary school. It makes sense to look at levels of repetition by two-year cycle since this is the teaching unit in the Spanish educational system, and according to regulations students can only repeat at the end of a cycle, not within a cycle. This gives teachers greater flexibility and fewer time constraints, but it also allows the obvious criticism to be made, which is that within the first year of each cycle students pass no matter what their grades or results are. This argument gains in followers at the level of compulsory scondary education (ESO), with the same tautological basis. In the table we can see that rates of repetition go from 2.3 percent in the first cycle (the first two years of primary school) to 3.5 percent in the third cycle (the last two years of primary school), so that the increase can be considered to be moderate.

TABLE 2.2

Rates of repetition in primary school by cycle and sex

Academic year 2006-2007. In percentages

	FIRST CYCLE	SECOND CYCLE	THIRD CYCLE
Total	**2.3**	**2.5**	**3.5**
Boys	1.9	2.1	4.4
Girls	2.6	2.8	2.7

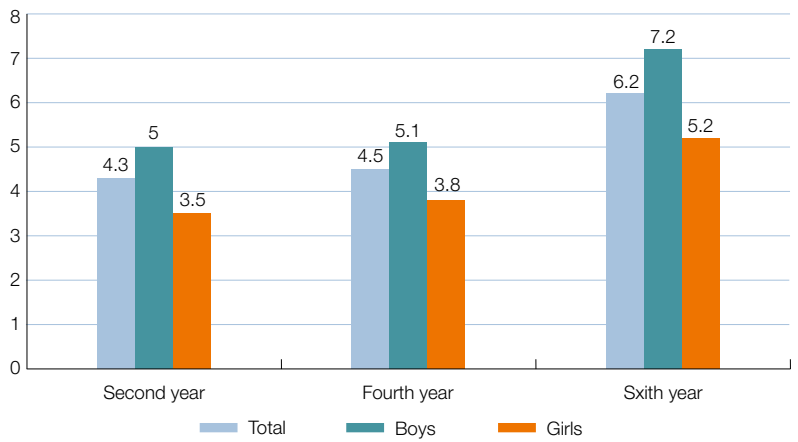
Source: Non-university education statistics 2009, Ministry of Education and author elaboration.

But presenting repetition rates by two-year cycle, which is what is normally done, is actually dividing the real rates in half, since repetition can only happen at the end of the cycle, every two years. Graph 2.2 presents the rates of repetition for years two, four and six; that is to say, for the final years of the first, second and third cycles respectively. Here we find rates that go from 4.3 percent in year two to 6.2 percent in year six. In addition, we can see that girls have a notable advantage over boys with a repetition rate two points lower, which with an average of six is a lot.

GRAPH 2.2

Percentage of students that repeat in primary school in the last year of each cycle, by sex

Academic year 2006-2007



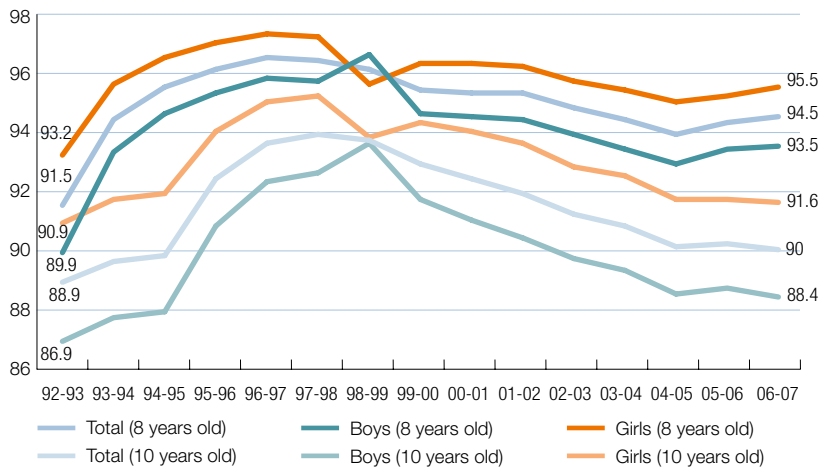
Source: Las Cifras de la Educación en España 2009 and author elaboration.

Graph 2.3 shows the trends in rates for the period 1992-2007 in two year intervals. There was an improvement up until 1997-1998 for 8 year old students and up until 1998-1999 for 10 year olds (a coherent gap, as 8 year olds in 1998-1999 would be 10 year olds in 2000-2001). But this trend changes, and with subsequent cohorts the rates begin to worsen from that point on. The difference in favor of girls reached a peak in 1992-1993 (3.3 points), its lowest level of difference in 1996-1998 (1.5) and then stabilized at around two percentage points.

GRAPH 2.3

Age adequacy rates of students 8 and 10 years of age by sex

1992-2007



Source: Non-university education statistics 2009, Ministry of Education and author elaboration.

Another important indicator is the age adequacy rate[2] for ages corresponding to this stage. Graph 2.3 shows the rates for 8 year old and 10 year old students, in year three and year five of primary school. As can be seen, 5.5 percent of the first cohort and 10 percent of the second cohort are already not where they should be according to their age. Again, girls have an advantage over boys: by two points at 8 years of age and by three points at 10.

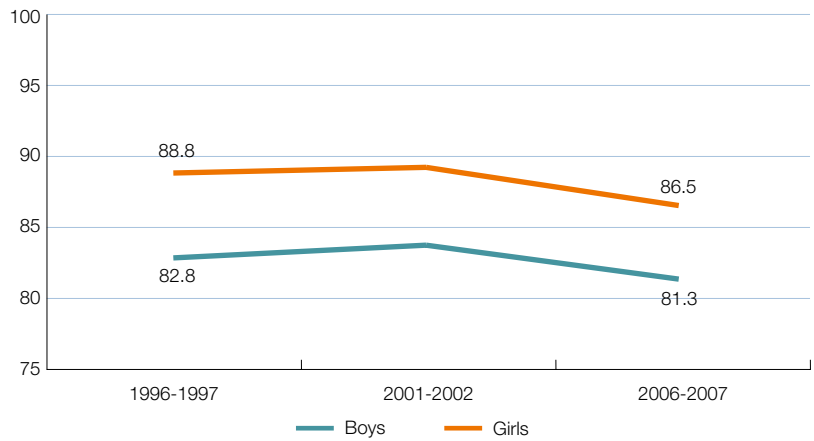
(2) The age adequacy rate is defined as the percentage of pupils that are in the school year they theoretically should be in, based on their age. The «correct» course levels are: for 8 year olds, year 3 of Primary School; for 10 year olds, year 5 of Primary school. Ages are determined on December 31.

The definitive indicator is without a doubt the proportion of students that finish primary school by the age of 12, which is shown in Graph 2.4. In this graph it can be seen that there is already a significant deviation from the ideal total, with 16 percent not finishing by this age. In addition, within the long decade considered (1996-2007), the proportion improved by almost one point in the first half of the decade and then worsened by almost three points in the second half. Once again we can see the advantage of girls: 5 percent more completing primary education in 2006-2007.

GRAPH 2.4

Percentage of students that complete primary school at 12 years of age, by sex

1996-2007



Source: Las Cifras de la Educación en España 2009 and author elaboration.

Finally, Table 2.3 shows the proportion of students who repeated during primary education at the time of arrival in ESO. They constitute 15 percent of the total, which is unevenly divided between 18 percent of the boys and 12 percent of the girls. Looking at the differences by autonomous community, the highest levels of repetition are in the Balearic Islands (23.3 percent total; 27.6 percent for boys), the Canary Islands (22.4 percent total; 27.1 percent for boys), Ceuta (25.5 percent total; 28.7 percent for boys) and Melilla (20.6 percent total; 23.3 percent for boys).

TABLE 2.3

Percentage of students that have repeated during primary school, by sex and autonomous community

Academic year 2006-2007

	TOTAL	BOYS	GIRLS	DIF.
Total	**15.0**	**17.9**	**12.0**	**5.9**
Andalusia	**17.8**	21.1	14.1	7.0
Aragon	**14.4**	17.1	11.7	5.4
Asturias	**14.0**	17.0	10.8	6.2
Balearic Islands	**23.3**	27.6	18.6	9.0
Basque Country	**11.6**	13.6	9.4	4.2
Canary Islands	**22.4**	27.1	17.4	9.7
Cantabria	**15.1**	18.9	11.0	7.9
Castilla and León	**15.2**	18.2	12.0	6.2
Castilla-La Mancha	**16.3**	19.8	12.6	7.2
Catalonia	**8.6**	9.9	7.1	2.8
Community of Valencia	**13.0**	15.5	10.5	5.0
Extremadura	**15.6**	19.8	11.2	8.6
Galicia	**16.4**	20.0	12.5	7.5
La Rioja	**11.0**	13.4	8.4	5.0
Madrid	**13.9**	15.9	11.8	4.1
Murcia	**19.0**	22.8	15.0	7.8
Navarre	**13.1**	15.0	11.1	3.9
Ceuta	**25.5**	28.7	22.0	6.7
Melilla	**20.6**	23.3	17.4	5.9

Source: Las Cifras de la Educación en España 2009 and author elaboration.

The data put into question the common hypothesis that the high level of school dropouts in these two autonomous regions, the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands, is essentially due to the possibility of employment in tourism, given that students begin to fall behind well before the age of employment. In addition note that the overall difference of 5.9 percent between boys and girls reaches 9.7 percent in the Canary Islands and 9 percent in the Balearic Islands, but also falls to 4.1 percent in Madrid and 4.2 percent in the Basque Country.

2.2. ESO as the crossroads of the system

Things change dramatically in ESO. As the law of dialectics states, *quantity transforms into quality*. Table 2.4 shows the net rates of school enrollment for ages 11 through18. It must be kept in mind that the compulsory age to enter ESO is 12 years of age;[3] those who enter at the age of 11 being an exception and do so as a result of skipping a year in primary school through a curriculum adaptation. On the opposite end are those who continue in ESO after 15 years of age—and their numbers are legion—due to having started started their schooling late or having repeated a year (or years) in primary or secondary school. What the results show is that 16 percent of the students who at the age of 12 should be starting ESO are still in primary school, and 33.8 percent of those who should have finished ESO will not have done so. The fact that there are no 19 year olds in the figures does not mean that they finished ESO or that they are prevented from doing so, but rather those that do not finish have to do so through Adult Education programs. We are therefore, dealing with figures greater than and of a different nature than those in primary school.

TABLE 2.4

Net enrollment rates by age, sex and level

Academic year 2006-2007. Rate

	TOTAL	PRIMARY	SPECIAL ED.	ESO	TOTAL	PRIMARY	SPECIAL ED.	ESO	TOTAL	PRIMARY	SPECIAL ED.	ESO
	TOTAL				BOYS				GIRLS			
11 years old	**99.9**	**99.3**	**0.4**	**0.2**	100	99.4	0.5	0.2	99.6	99.1	0.3	0.2
12 years old	**99.8**	**16.1**	**0.5**	**83.3**	100	18.6	0.6	80.8	99.5	13.4	0.4	85.8
13 years old	**100**	**0.5**	**0.5**	**99.0**	100	0.5	0.6	98.9	100	0.4	0.4	99.2
14 years old	**100**	**–**	**0.6**	**99.4**	100	–	0.6	99.4	100	–	0.5	99.5
15 years old	**98.0**	**–**	**0.5**	**97.3**	98.0	–	0.7	97.2	97.9	–	0.4	97.4
16 years old	**87.6**	**–**	**0.6**	**33.8**	84.8	–	0.7	35.6	90.6	–	0.4	31.8
17 years old	**75.7**	**–**	**0.5**	**11.6**	70.6	–	0.6	12.0	81.1	–	0.4	11.2
18 years old	**62.5**	**–**	**0.4**	**0.6**	56.6	–	0.5	0.6	68.7	–	0.3	0.7

Source: Las Cifras de la Educación en España 2009 and author elaboration.

(3) Do not forget that the age of the student is based on his/her age on December 31 in the academic year for the level he/she is in. Those who enter ESO at 11 but who turn 12 by 31 December are counted in the figures as 12 years old, and the same is true for all successive years.

Table 2.5 shows the same situation but from a different perspective. If we look at the age of the students registered in the fourth year of ESO in 2006-2007, the figures indicate that 63.1 percent were the appropriate age of 15, while 23.7 percent were one year behind and 13.2 percent were two or more years behind. Again, there is a significant difference between girls and boys: the percentage of girls in the appropriate year for their age is three points higher than for boys.

TABLE 2.5

Percentage distribution by age of student in 4th year of ESO

Academic year 2006-2007

	TOTAL			BOYS			GIRLS		
Age	15 OR LESS	16	17 +	15 OR LESS	16	17 +	15 OR LESS	16	17 +
Total	**63.1**	**23.7**	**13.2**	**59.8**	**25.9**	**14.3**	**66.1**	**21.8**	**12.1**
Andalusia	59.7	26.5	13.8	57.0	27.9	15.0	62.2	25.1	12.7
Aragon	65.3	20.8	14.0	61.2	23.4	15.4	68.9	18.4	12.7
Asturias	63.1	18.2	18.7	58.7	20.0	21.3	67.6	16.4	16.0
Balearic Islands	60.7	26.8	12.6	57.0	29.3	13.7	64.0	24.5	11.6
Basque Country	73.0	18.1	8.9	69.2	20.7	10.1	76.8	15.5	7.7
Canary Islands	57.7	26.8	15.6	54.3	27.8	17.8	60.7	25.8	13.5
Cantabria	58.1	24.0	17.8	55.8	25.6	18.6	60.4	22.5	17.0
Castilla and León	60.4	19.8	19.7	56.9	21.4	21.7	63.8	18.4	17.8
Castilla-La Mancha	60.9	22.1	17.0	58.9	23.9	17.2	62.5	20.6	16.9
Catalonia	69.9	24.0	6.1	65.8	27.3	6.9	74.0	20.7	5.3
Community of Valencia	62.2	28.6	9.2	58.1	32.0	9.9	65.9	25.5	8.5
Extremadura	56.7	24.6	18.7	52.6	27.4	20.0	60.3	22.1	17.6
Galicia	64.1	20.6	15.3	59.6	22.7	17.7	68.2	18.7	13.1
La Rioja	66.4	21.2	12.4	63.3	22.9	13.8	69.3	19.6	11.1
Madrid	62.8	20.6	16.6	60.6	21.8	17.6	64.9	19.4	15.6
Murcia	59.7	24.0	16.2	56.1	26.3	17.6	63.1	21.9	15.0
Navarre	71.8	21.4	6.8	67.8	24.2	7.9	75.9	18.5	5.5
Ceuta	63.8	24.2	12.0	66.2	22.1	11.7	61.7	26.0	12.3
Melilla	61.2	23.8	14.9	58.0	25.2	16.9	64.2	22.6	13.2

Source: Las Cifras de la Educación en España and author elaboration.

Table 2.6 presents the figures and percentages of students that repeat for each year of ESO. First of all, it shows that the rates are significantly higher than in

primary school: one out of six and almost one out of five students repeat. The highest percentage is in the third year with 18.67 percent and the lowest in the fourth year with 12.79 percent. This decrease in the final year of ESO is due to the fact that many students leave ESO with only a certificate for having attended ESO but without receiving a diploma as graduates in order to avoid having to repeat. It is also important to note that the difference in repetition rates between boys and girls decreases over the four years, starting at 6.28 percent in the first year and dropping by almost half by the fourth year to 3.07 percent. This decrease can be attributed to the same reason: not being able to pass the final year girls are more likely to repeat and boys are more likly to drop out of school.

TABLE 2.6

Rate of repetition in ESO, by year and sex

Academic year 2006-2007

	FIRST CYCLE		SECOND CYCLE	
	FIRST YEAR	SECOND YEAR	THIRD YEAR	FOURTH YEAR
Total	**17.1**	**15.5**	**18.7**	**12.8**
Girls	13.7	13.0	16.5	11.3
Boys	20.0	17.8	20.8	14.4
Dif. B>G	6.3	4.8	4.3	3.1

Source: Non-university education statistics, Ministry of Education and author elaboration.

Analyses of academic results often look at the percentages of students who are promoted from one year to the next. For the four successive years of ESO, these percentages are 81.9 percent, 79.7 percent, 75.7 percent and 78.7 percent (from the year 2005-2006).[4] These rates that would clearly amount to a lower number of students not progressing to the next level than would seem evident based on the number of repeaters we have seen in the data we have just looked at are not calculated based on the total number of registered students but only on the number of those that take exams and receive grades. Therefore, the number is lower as not all students take exams. In any case, the rates shown in Table 2.7 once again show the academic superiority of girls over boys, with a difference of 6 to 8 percentage points in all of the years.

(4) Non-university education statistics. Detailed results. Academic year 2006-2007. IV.1 Registered students. Enseñanzas de Régimen General. IV.1.4. Compulsory Secondary Education. Table 7. http://www.mepsyd.es/mecd/jsp/plantilla.jsp?id=310&area=estadisticas.

TABLE 2.7

Percentage of students that are promoted to the next year, by sex

Academic year 2005-2006

CYCLE	YEAR	TOTAL	BOYS	GIRLS	DIFFERENCE G>B
1	1	**81.9**	78.9	85.3	6.4
	2	**79.7**	76	83.7	7.7
2	3	**75.7**	72.5	79	6.5
	4	**78.7**	75.7	81.5	5.8

Source: Las Cifras de la Educación en España and author elaboration.

These difficulties result in a growing number of students falling behind during ESO. Table 2.8 shows the proportion of students who have repeated by the time they get to the fourth year and among them those who repeated for the first time upon arriving in ESO and not at earlier stages, by autonomus region. Four out of ten students, exactly 42 percent, get to the fourth year having repeated, and more than one fourth, 27 percent, repeat for the first time in ESO. By autonomous region, the repetition rate is especially high, as could be inferred from the data in Table 2.5, in the Canary Islands and the Balearic Islands as well as in Ceuta and Melilla, but also in Andalusia and Castilla-La Mancha, while it is comparatively low in the Basque Country, Catalonia and Navarre.

Regarding age adequacy rates, that is to say, the correspondence between biological age and school level, the rates decrease between 12 and 15 years of age, reaching 57.4 percent at 15 years of age, which means that less than three out of five students are in the right year of school for their age. Graph 2.5 shows age adequacy rates for ages 12, 14 and 15 from the years 1992-1993 to 2006-2007. It can be seen that the rate increased for the three cohorts up until the end of the 1990s but throughout this decade it has steadily decreased. The adequacy rate for 12 year olds in 2006-2007 was higher than that of the first year in the graph, 1992-1993 (84.1 percent compared to 77.8 percent), but for the other two ages it was below; for 14 year olds 66.5 percent compared to 68 percent and for 15 year olds 57.4 percent compared to 60.6 percent. If we compare the rates for 2006-2007 with the highest rates in the nineties rather than with the first year in the figures, the results are frankly quite worrying; the 12 year old cohort lost 4.3 points; the 14 year olds, 10.9 and the 15 year olds, 7.3.

TABLE 2.8

Situation of students that are 15 years of age in the education system

Academic year 2006-2007. In percentages

	THAT REACH 4TH YEAR OF ESO WHEN THEY ARE 15	THAT HAVE REPEATED BEFORE 4TH YEAR OF ESO	
		TOTAL	THAT REPEATED FOR THE FIRST TIME DURING ESO
Total	**57.4**	**42.6**	**27.6**
Andalusia	51.1	48.9	31.1
Aragon	59.1	40.9	26.5
Asturias	62.1	37.9	23.9
Balearic Islands	52.2	47.8	24.5
Basque Country	70.7	29.3	17.7
Canary Islands	49.2	50.8	28.4
Cantabria	58.2	41.8	26.7
Castilla and Leon	57.0	43.0	27.8
Castilla-La Mancha	52.8	47.2	30.9
Catalonia	68.4	31.6	23.0
Community of Valencia	55.0	45.0	32.0
Extremadura	51.4	48.6	33.0
Galicia	58.9	41.1	24.7
La Rioja	58.9	41.1	30.1
Madrid	59.7	40.3	26.4
Murcia	53.4	46.6	27.6
Navarre	66.7	33.3	20.2
Ceuta	49.1	50.9	25.4
Melilla	49.2	50.8	30.2

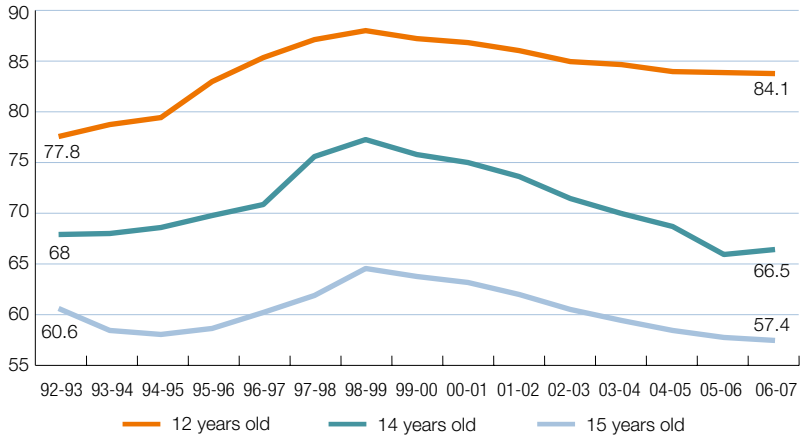
Source: Las Cifras de la Educación en España and author elaboration.

As always, the figures for boys cause greater concern than those for girls as is indicated in Graph 2.6, which shows that for the cohort that reached 15 years of age in 2006-2007, there is a difference of 12.4 percentage points in favor of girls, a difference that reflects an overall increase in the difference in adequacy rates between girls and boys of three points over the period 1992-2007 from an initial 9.2 points.

GRAPH 2.5

Age adequacy rates for 12, 14 and 15 years of age

1991-2007

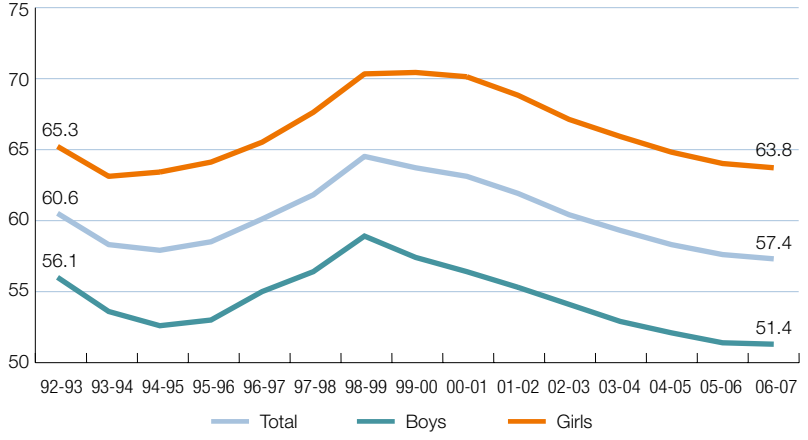


Source: Non-university education statistics, Ministry of Education and author elaboration.

GRAPH 2.6

Age adequacy rates at 15 years of age, by sex

1991-2007



Source: Non-university education statistics, Ministry of Education and author elaboration.

Table 2.9 shows a series of adequacy rates for the three cohorts for the whole country and for each of the autonomous communities for two academic years separated by a decade; 1996-1997 and 2006-2007, as well as the differences between them. As can be seen in the columns which show the differences, these are generally negative, as they reflect a decrease in the proportion of students at age adequate levels. The last column presents a composite index which is the sum of the differences for the three cohorts. Such an index cannot be read as a composite rate, which it is not, but as a synthesis once gains and losses of the three cohorts are offset at the end of the period for each community. Although we generally find accumulative loses (lower adequacy rates), we should mention the improved rates among the communities that were the worst: Ceuta, Melilla and, though only lightly, Galicia; in addition we should note the notable differences in the evolution of some communities, almost all with worse adequacy rates but some with significant or sharp declines and others with only more modertate ones. Finally, we should note the apparent abritrariness of the evolution of the adequacy rates for the different ages in each community, in other words, the fact that each community seems to place additional obstacles in students' paths in different periods in their educational trajectory.

Compulsory secondary education offers additional avenues for students to keep pace or for students that fall behind. Specifically, starting in the third year students can be assigned to curriculum diversification programs or groups[(5)] in which they are exempted from certain subjects in the normal curriculum. Instead, these subjects are adapted to a form more focused on preparation for entrance into the workforce but in such a way that the students can still obtain the secondary education diploma at the end of the fourth year. This diversification is the school's last resort so to speak, before separating the student from the common trajectory. To be eligible for diversification programmes students must be 16 years of age which means they would already be at least one year behind in school. Table 2.10 shows the percentages of students included in Curriculum Diversification Programs by year, sex and type of school. In total

(5) Curricular diversification programmes are developed under the regulations set out in article 23 of the LOGSE, which includes the possibility that for certain students 16 years of age or older, a diversified curriculum can be established so that the objectives of Compulsory Secondary Education, and the corresponding diploma can be attained through a specific methodology and through content and even subject areas different from those of a general character.

8.4 percent of students are in these programmes: 6.8 percent in the third year and 10.2 percent in the fourth year.

TABLE 2.9

Age adequacy rates at 12, 14 and 15 years of age, by autonomous communities

	12 YEARS OF AGE			14 YEARS OF AGE			15 YEARS OF AGE			COMPOSITE INDEX
	1996/97	2006/07	DIF.	1996/97	2006/07	DIF.	1996/97	2006/07	DIF.	
Total	**85.7**	**84.1**	**–1.6**	**71.0**	**66.5**	**–4.5**	**60.2**	**57.4**	**–2.8**	**–8.9**
Andalusia	81.7	82.5	0.8	64.0	60.5	–3.5	53.7	51.1	–2.6	–5.3
Aragon	90.8	82.6	–8.2	79.1	66.7	–12.4	69.8	59.1	–10.7	–31.3
Asturias	89.0	83.6	–5.4	75.2	69.7	–5.5	64.9	62.1	–2.8	–13.7
Balearic Islands	81.5	76.2	–5.3	62.5	62.1	–0.4	51.3	52.2	0.9	–4.8
Basque Country	90.4	87.8	–2.6	81.4	77.3	–4.1	69.4	70.7	1.3	–5.4
Canary Islands	76.6	75.9	–0.7	57.3	58.4	1.1	46.4	49.2	2.8	3.2
Cantabria	88.2	85.0	–3.2	72.6	67.0	–5.6	59.0	58.2	–0.8	–9.6
Castilla and Leon	88.0	82.9	–5.1	71.7	66.8	–4.9	61.2	57.0	–4.2	–14.2
Castilla-La Mancha	86.0	81.2	–4.8	67.2	63.1	–4.1	58.0	52.8	–5.2	–14.1
Catalonia	89.5	90.4	0.9	81.5	75.2	–6.3	69.2	68.4	–0.8	–6.2
Community of Valencia	86.8	85.8	–1.0	73.4	66.3	–7.1	59.2	55.0	–4.2	–12.3
Extremadura	84.4	83.7	–0.7	65.1	60.8	–4.3	56.4	51.4	–5.0	–10.0
Galicia	84.1	83.8	–0.3	69.3	69.5	0.2	58.4	58.9	0.5	0.4
La Rioja	89.4	87.2	–2.2	77.1	67.4	–9.7	69.2	58.9	–10.3	–22.2
Madrid	88.8	84.8	–4.0	73.2	69.4	–3.8	62.3	59.7	–2.6	–10.4
Murcia	83.9	78.3	–5.6	66.3	61.4	–4.9	57.2	53.4	–3.8	–14.3
Navarre	90.7	85.6	–5.1	80.9	76.2	–4.7	74.2	66.7	–7.5	–17.3
Ceuta	66.0	70.1	4.1	52.9	56.2	3.3	48.7	49.1	0.4	7.8
Melilla	73.2	80.5	7.3	46.2	57.1	10.9	48.1	49.2	1.1	19.3

Source: Non-university education statistics, Ministry of Education 2009, and author elaboration.

As usual, female students place better than male students with one percentage point less in these programmes. Regarding types of school, almost three times as many students in public schools are in diversification as in private schools (11 percent compared to 4.3 percent). This could be the result of differences in student profiles in these schools, greater attention being paid to diversification

or to a greater tendency to separate students with difficulties in public schools, but there are no figures available on this.

TABLE 2.10

Percentage of students that are in curriculum diversification programmes during the second cycle of ESO, by year, sex and type of school

Academic year 2006-2007

TOTAL	**Total**	**8.4**	**Total**	**8.4**
	Boys	8.8	Public	11.0
	Girls	8.0	Private state subsidized	4.3
			Other private	0.1
THIRD YEAR	**Total**	**6.8**	**Total**	**6.8**
	Boys	7.1	Public	8.7
	Girls	6.4	Private state subsidized	3.7
			Other private	0.1
FOURTH YEAR	**Total**	**10.2**	**Total**	**10.2**
	Boys	10.8	Public	13.6
	Girls	9.7	Private state subsidized	5.1
			Other private	0.0

Source: Las Cifras de la Educación en España 2009, and author elaboration.

2.3. To finish or not to finish ESO; that is the question

Table 2.11 shows the distribution of graduates with a diploma in secondary education and those with the secondary education certificate (without the diploma). Almost three out of ten, 28.4 percent, did not obtain the diploma in 2006-2007. Bear in mind that these are students who make it to the fourth year of ESO and pass it, while others fall by the wayside without even getting the certificate. The table shows the differences by autonomous community with the already mentioned position of the Balearic Islands, the Canary Islands, Andalusia, Extremadura, Ceuta and Melilla at the bottom of the list and the Basque Country, Navarre and Asturias at the top.

TABLE 2.11

Percentage of students that leave ESO without having graduated by autonomous community

Academic year 2006-2007

Total	**28.4**
Andalusia	32.9
Aragon	25.8
Asturias	17.3
Balearic Islands	32.4
Basque Country	16.0
Canary Islands	31.1
Cantabria	20.2
Castilla and Leon	23.7
Castilla-La Mancha	32.4
Catalonia	23.6
Community of Valencia	36.7
Extremadura	30.4
Galicia	26.9
La Rioja	28.0
Madrid	25.3
Murcia	28.9
Navarre	19.8
Ceuta	45.8
Melilla	34.6

Source: Las Cifras de la Educación en España 2009 and author elaboration.

Table 2.12 reveals the following differences related to sex: 78.6 percent of girls graduated from the ESO while 64.9 percent of boys did in the 2006-2007; this is almost a 14 point difference. The difference is even greater, more than double, in public schools (16.7 points) than in private schools (7.5 points). On the other hand, students in private schools have a clear advantage over those in public schools, with an almost 20 percent greater likelihood of graduating from ESO (83.8 percent graduate in private schools while 65.3 percent graduate in public schools). However, as we will see, a large part of this difference is related to the student not to the type of school. In correspondence with the above, they offer a greater comparative advantage to their male students (in

comparison to male students in public schools) than to their female students (in comparison to female students in public schools).

TABLE 2.12

Percentage of students that graduate from ESO by sex and type of school

Academic year 2006-2007

	THAT GRADUATE			G>B
	TOTAL	BOYS	GIRLS	
All schools	**71.6**	64.9	78.6	13.7
Public schools	**65.3**	57.1	73.8	16.7
Private schools	**83.8**	80.1	87.5	7.5
Private > public	**18.5**	22.9	13.7	

Source: Las Cifras de la Educación en España 2009, and author elaboration.

The poor results in secondary education can be seen in the evolution of the gross graduation rates from ESO shown in Table 2.13. The period considered begins with academic year 1999-2000 when ESO was established. The table shows that the percentage of students graduating has declined by four points nationally. This figure includes relatively positive regional results comparatively speaking and acceptable results in absolute terms (as in Murcia, Extremadura, Galicia, or Cantabria where graduation rates rose by three points) and some very good results (Melilla, where rates rose ten points) as well as others with rates that are clearly unacceptable (Valencia where rates decreased by fourteen points) and quite poor (Andalucia where they decreased by more than seven points).

In graph 2.7 the notable habitual advantage of girls can be seen, as they have a graduation rate 15 percent higher than boys at the beginning of the period analyzed which declines slightly to 14 points at the end of the period.

TABLE 2.13

Gross percentage of the population which graduates from ESO by autonomous community, 1999-2006

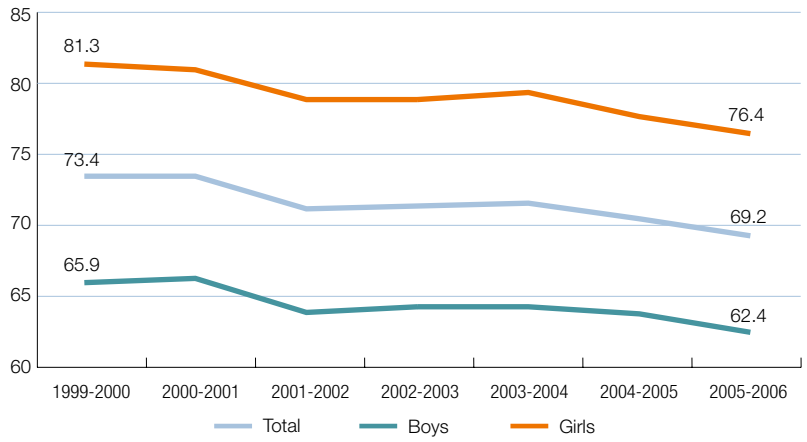
	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	VARIACIÓ PERÍODE
Total	**73.4**	**73.4**	**71.1**	**71.3**	**71.5**	**70.4**	**69.2**	**–4.2**
Andalusia	73.3	72.9	66.2	66.5	66.4	65.2	66.0	–7.3
Aragon	75.4	75.4	75.2	75.5	72.6	74.2	70.9	–4.5
Asturias	83.0	84.1	83.3	86.0	80.2	85.2	83.5	0.5
Balearic Islands	64.9	64.5	66.5	63.2	62.8	62.0	62.0	–2.9
Basque Country	82.0	82.2	82.6	81.5	86.4	83.4	83.0	1.0
Canary Islands	67.7	67.5	64.7	66.5	66.6	64.9	64.1	–3.6
Cantabria	76.2	80.9	76.7	78.9	77.2	77.0	77.6	1.4
Castilla and Leon	76.9	77.4	77.6	76.1	79.8	79.0	77.5	0.6
Castilla-La Mancha	65.3	66.6	64.8	67.0	67.7	69.7	66.3	1.0
Catalonia	75.5	75.4	75.5	74.6	75.0	72.2	71.6	–3.9
Community of Valencia	74.7	69.2	67.2	67.8	67.3	64.2	60.3	–14.4
Extremadura	65.4	66.0	63.8	67.2	67.6	67.2	67.6	2.2
Galicia	73.1	75.9	75.3	76.3	76.5	76.1	74.9	1.8
La Rioja	73.5	74.3	67.1	69.8	71.8	71.6	71.4	–2.1
Madrid	74.3	75.9	74.6	74.3	74.1	73.9	70.8	–3.5
Murcia	64.4	65.1	65.3	66.2	66.0	66.7	67.5	3.1
Navarre	80.4	81.6	79.1	79.7	82.9	81.7	77.7	–2.7
Ceuta	52.5	53.0	52.7	46.6	57.4	49.9	48.0	–4.5
Melilla	52.3	54.9	56.6	50.6	52.8	57.7	62.5	10.2

Note: The establishment of ESO was completed in academic year 1999-2000, therefore this indicator is not representative for previous academic years.
Source: Non-university education statistics 2009, Ministry of Education, and author elaboration.

GRAPH 2.7

Gross percentage of the population which graduates ESO, by sex

1999-2006



Note: The establishment of ESO was completed in academic year 1999-2000, therefore this indicator is not representative for previous academic years.
Source: Non-university education statistics 2009, Ministry of Education, and author elaboration.

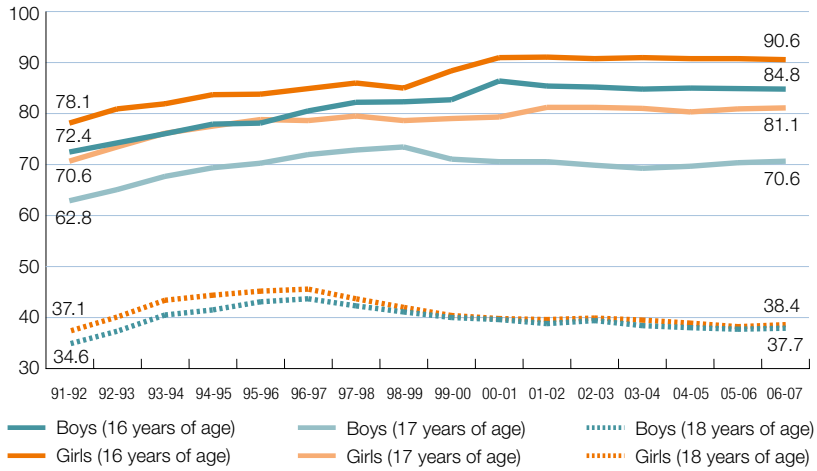
2.4. Is there school life after ESO? Not for many

Once compulsory education is over there is nothing obliging adolescents to stay in school and the possibility of dropping out and entering the labour market appears. Graph 2.8 shows the trends in net rates of school enrollment for 16 to 18 year olds, which is only a partial indicator of students that drop out after ESO, as some cohorts continue in ESO because they have fallen behind. We see that at the beginning of the nineties that approximately one out of every four students of 16 years of age dropped out of school; this figure decreased by 12.4 points in 2006-2007. The proportion dropped by around 10 points for 17 year old cohorts, undoubtedly due to those who finish ESO later than they should. These proportions are the reverse of the net school enrollment rate for 16 year olds shown in graph 2.8, which as can be seen, increased considerably from 75.2 percent in 1991-1992 to 88.6 percent in 2000-2001, then slowly and gradually fell to 87.6 percent in 2006-2007. The same thing occurred, with some slight variations, for the three other cohort groups and for each sex considered separately.

GRAPH 2.8

Net enrollment rate for ages 16 through 18, by sex

1991-2007



Source: Non-university education statistics 2009, Ministry of Education, and author elaboration.

Table 2.14 shows the differences by autonomous community. The first three columns show net enrollment rates for each autonomous region. And the following three show the differences between regional and national percentages (national percentage subtracted from regional percentage). These figures indicate the percentage point difference of each autonomous community from the national average and whether they are above or below the national average. What stands out is the worrying position of the Balearic Islands, the Community of Valencia, and the Canary Islands, as well as the advantageous position of the Basque Country, Castilla and Leon and Asturias.

After ESO, for those who continue studying there is the baccalaureate (Bachillerato) and intermediate vocational training (Ciclos Formativos de Grado Medio). There is also the Social Guarantee programme, but this is not part of post-compulsory secondary education; hence, whatever intrinsic value it may have, it does not bring us close to achieving the Lisbon objective, and in addition, it is exclusively designed for those who do not finish ESO and is itself another way of differentiating students. Table 2.15 shows the net school enrollment rates by age, sex and type of education for young people between 16

and 18 years of age. Sixteen and seventeen year olds can be in ESO (meaning they have had to repeat) and post-compulsory education (entering for the first time, apart from exceptions), and 18 year olds in the university (apart from a few numerically irrelevant exceptions, at 17 years old). It is noteworthy that Table 2.15 reveals that never do even two-thirds of this cohort (not even 17 year olds) make it to post-compulsory secondary education.

TABLE 2.14

Net enrollment rate for ages 16 through 18, by autonomous community

	PERCENTAGES			DIFFERENCE W/ RESPECT TO NATIONAL AVG.		
Age	16	17	18	16	17	18
Spain	**87.6**	**75.7**	**38.0**	**–**	**–**	**–**
Andalusia	87.6	72.7	37.5	0.0	–3.0	–0.5
Aragon	90.2	81.3	40.3	2.6	5.6	2.3
Asturias	94.6	86.2	40.0	7.0	10.5	2.0
Balearic Islands	78.5	61.1	29.9	–9.1	–14.6	–8.1
Basque Country	96.1	93.6	45.6	8.5	17.9	7.6
Canary Islands	84.8	71.6	40.1	–2.8	–4.1	2.1
Cantabria	94.7	81.3	46.9	7.1	5.6	8.9
Castilla and Leon	96.2	87.5	45.6	8.6	11.8	7.6
Castilla-La Mancha	86.5	73.4	34.8	–1.1	–2.3	–3.2
Catalonia	84.9	72.1	36.6	–2.7	–3.6	–1.4
Community of Valencia	82.7	70.4	34.4	–4.9	–5.3	–3.6
Extremadura	91.5	76.8	39.5	3.9	1.1	1.5
Galicia	90.5	80.6	43.5	2.9	4.9	5.5
La Rioja	90.0	77.9	37.6	2.4	2.2	–0.4
Madrid	87.3	78.2	36.0	–0.3	2.5	–2.0
Murcia	88.7	73.7	36.8	1.1	–2.0	–1.2
Navarre	88.1	82.9	41.2	0.5	7.2	3.2
Ceuta	87.4	74.4	38.2	–0.2	–1.3	0.2
Melilla	92.7	79.7	36.7	5.1	4.0	–1.3

Source: Non-university education statistics 2009, Ministry of Education, and author elaboration.

TABLE 2.15

Net enrollment rates by age, sex and type of education

1999-2007

Age		16		17		18	
		BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS
1999-2000	Comp. Ed. (1)	37.6	31.8	13.1	11.4	1.6	1.6
	Post. Comp. Sec. Ed. (2)	45.0	56.7	57.9	67.5	36.0	35.8
	Non-Univ. Higher Ed. (3)	–	–	–	–	2.1	2.8
2000-2001	Comp. Ed.	38.0	31.3	12.5	10.8	1.3	1.1
	Post. Comp. Sec. Ed.	48.4	59.7	58.0	68.6	35.2	34.9
	Non-Univ. Higher Ed.	–	–	–	–	2.9	3.6
2001-2002	Comp. Ed.	37.5	31.7	11.5	10.0	1.2	1.1
	Post. Comp. Sec. Ed.	47.9	59.4	59.1	71.3	33.8	33.7
	Non-Univ. Higher Ed.	–	–	–	–	3.7	4.6
2002-2003	Comp. Ed.	38.0	32.5	11.6	10.4	1.0	0.9
	Post. Comp. Sec. Ed.	47.2	58.3	58.0	70.7	34.7	34.3
	Non-Univ. Higher Ed.	–	–	0.1	0.1	3.6	4.6
2003-2004	Comp. Ed.	37.9	33.2	11.8	10.6	0.9	0.7
	Post. Comp. Sec. Ed.	46.8	57.8	57.3	70.3	33.9	33.9
	Non-Univ. Higher Ed.	–	–	0.1	0.1	3.4	4.6
2004-2005	Comp. Ed.	36.7	32.0	11.9	10.9	0.9	0.8
	Post. Comp. Sec. Ed.	48.3	58.8	57.6	69.4	33.5	33.5
	Non-Univ. Higher Ed.	–	–	0.1	0.1	3.3	4.4
2005-2006	Comp. Ed.	36.6	32.5	12.3	11.3	1.1	1.0
	Post. Comp. Sec. Ed.	48.4	58.4	58.0	69.6	33.3	32.8
	Non-Univ. Higher Ed.	–	–	0.1	0.1	3.1	4.2
2006-2007	Comp. Ed.	36.3	32.2	12.5	11.6	1.1	1.0
	Post. Comp. Sec. Ed.	48.5	58.4	58.0	69.4	33.5	32.9
	Non-Univ. Higher Ed.	–	–	–	–	3.1	4.4

(1) Compulsory Education: ESO and Special Education
(2) Post compulsory secondary education: Baccalaureate (face to face and distance learning), intermediate vocational training (face to face and distance learning), intermediate training in art and design and in sporting activities and applied arts and Social Guarantee programmes.
(3) Non-university higher education: Advanced vocational training (face to face and distance learning), Advanced training in art and design and in sporting activities, higher artistic education.
Source: Non-university education statistics 2009, Ministry of Education and author elaboration.

The distribution of ESO graduates in the baccalaureate and intermediate vocational training is important to take into account as this seems to be one of the endemic problems of the Spanish educational system. Table 2.16 shows this distribution between 1990-1991 and 2007-2008 (with provisional data for the last year). Although the data is divided into simple categories, included under the category of the baccalaureate is not only the current baccalaureate programme but other now extinct variations, which in the beginning of the observed period still existed, such as for example, the BUP+COU and the *experimental baccalaureate* which existed just prior to the passage of the LOGSE (General Law on the Education System). Included under the category of the current Intermediate Vocational Training is also the previous Vocational Training I programme (FP-I), which ended in 1999-2000, and included under the category of Advanced Vocational Training is the previous Vocational Training II (FP II), which ended in 2002-2003.[6] Students are compared by two-year cycle and not by year, and even less so by access, so given that repetition and dropout rates are not the same in different cycles, the results are therefore approximate. On the other hand, the two levels of vocational training are two years long and were also two years long in the past, but the two year baccalaureate has replaced the old BUP and COU, which together made up four years of study (even though some students went from BUP to Vocational Training II). The first two years of BUP-COU was absorbed by the ESO, but as there were many students repeating the BUP-COU program continued until 2001-2002.

(6) The change from FPII to Advanced Vocational Training is not great: students accessed FPII primarily after going through eleven years of general education (eight years of basic general education (EGB) and three years of BUP (General Unified Baccalaureate or Bachillerato Unificado Polivalente in Spanish), although there also existed a path, which was seldom taken, from FP I with an extra year), and today they access advanced vocational training cycles after successfully passing 12 years of schooling (six in primary, four in ESO and two in the baccalaureate). In contrast, intermediate vocational training requires students to have successfully passed ten years of schooling, graduating from ESO after six years of primary school, while the old FP I was filled above all with students from EGB (certified for their attendance but not successful graduates). The baccalaureate, as was mentioned, has been reduced to two years, today occupying the place the was then occupied by the third year of BUP and the one year COU (one year compulsory university orientation course), the eleventh and twelfth years of general education and providing preparation for university study (and now advanced vocational training).

TABLE 2.16

Number of students enrolled by type of programme

1990-2008

	BACC.	INT. VT	ADV. VT	TOTAL IN VT
1990-1991	1,592,330	475,635	4,540	480,175
1991-1992	1,633,432	479,344	8,605	487,949
1992-1993	1,580,552	449,625	12,943	462,568
1993-1994	1,593,833	422,963	16,400	439,363
1994-1995	1,555,638	382,840	23,212	406,052
1995-1996	1,445,555	331,672	32,884	378,552
1996-1997	1,309,797	280,925	55,200	353,354
1997-1998	1,195,500	245,256	80,661	350,190
1998-1999	964,163	189,349	111,276	329,644
1999-2000	797,924	161,550	148,615	343,141
2000-2001	766,518	192,244	185,745	419,539
2001-2002	714,390	211,622	210,107	465,645
2002-2003	679,773	225,479	231,334	503,094
2003-2004	657,400	230,688	236,756	513,343
2004-2005	646,174	233,513	229,462	509,026
2005-2006	640,028	232,149	221,904	498,980
2006-2007	630,349	235,224	218,319	499,467
2007-2008	619,939	239,990	224,413	510,907

Source: Non-university education statistics 2009, Ministry of Education and author elaboration.

Graph 2.9 shows that although the intermediate vocational training cycle) has grown in popularity during the period 1990-2008, it has barely attracted even one fourth of those who remain in school (27.9 percent in 2007-2008). This is an imbalance which has existed in the Spanish system since the 1970s. The first attempt to correct this came with the Proposed Reform of Secondary Education [Proyecto de Reforma de las Enseñanzas Medias] proposed by the first democratic government (MEC/Vázquez,[7] 1981), but which was never passed. The most recent voice of alarm was raised not long ago by the OECD (2008ª, b). The good news is the growth in the advanced vocational training cycles from barely 80,000 students in its precursor, vocational

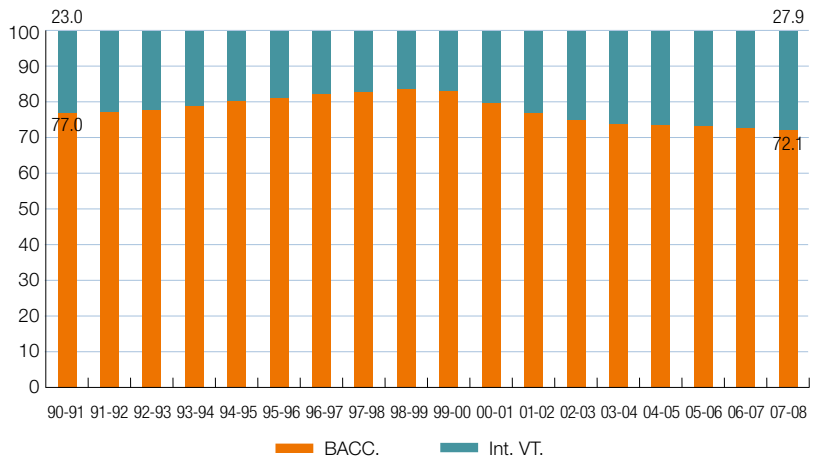
(7) The *green* or *white* paper, as it was green framed by white, for the proposed reform put forward by the UCD, was of anonomous authorship but, according to indications, was actually the work of the ill-fated Raúl Vázquez.

training II (FPII), in 1997-1998 to more than 224,000 students in 2007-2008. This expansion of the advanced vocational training could in part justify the growth in the number of students doing the baccalaureate, which is the pre-requisite for advanced vocational training, but given the high failure rate in the baccalaureate, which we will turn to shortly, and that the majority of those who graduate from the baccalaureate go on to university and not on to advanced vocational training, the expansion of the baccalaureate as the main post compulsory educational option does not seem to be justified.

GRAPH 2.9

Distribution of students enrolled in the baccalaureate and in intermediate vocational training cycles

1990-2008. In percentages



Source: Non-university education statistics 2009, Ministry of Education and author elaboration.

2.5. The Baccalaureate: many are called but few are chosen

Graph 2.10 shows enrollment in the baccalaureate by sex and by type of school (public or private). Once again the advantage of female students can be seen, ten points higher than that of male students (9.4 percent), gaining one point during the course of the period observed. The minor role of prívate schools can also be seen, remaining at one fourth of the students. In both cases, the trend has slightly reversed in recent years with a slight decrease in the proportion of

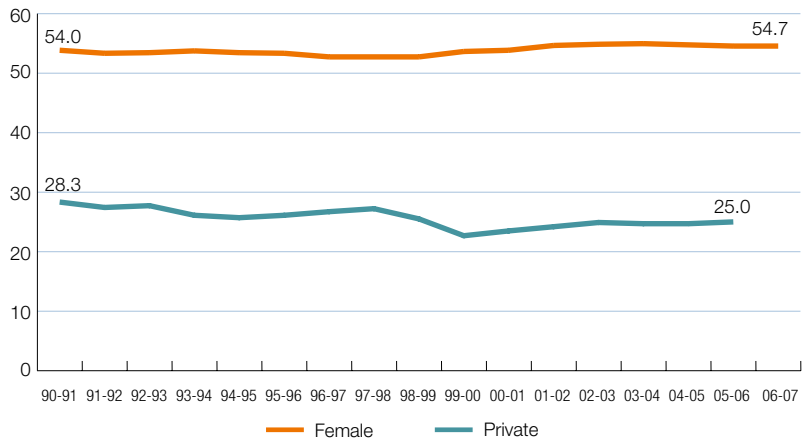
female students and a slight increase in students in private schools, but these slight variations do not change the dominant trend.

The following data refers to the diverse variations of failure and success. Graph 2.11 shows the distribution by age of students in the second year of the baccalaureate. It should be noted that the correct or *ideal* age at this level is 17 years of age, thus we see that 37 percent of the students in the second year of baccalaureate have been in school longer than they should, and 13.6 percent are more than two years behind. However, this *delay* does not necessarily happen during the baccalaureate but may be inherited from earlier educational stages. This data only refers to those that are in the baccalaureate, it does not take into account students that dropped out during the cycle.

GRAPH 2.10

Percent students in the baccalaureate by sex and type of school

1990-2007



Source: Non-university education statistics 2009, Ministry of Education and author elaboration.

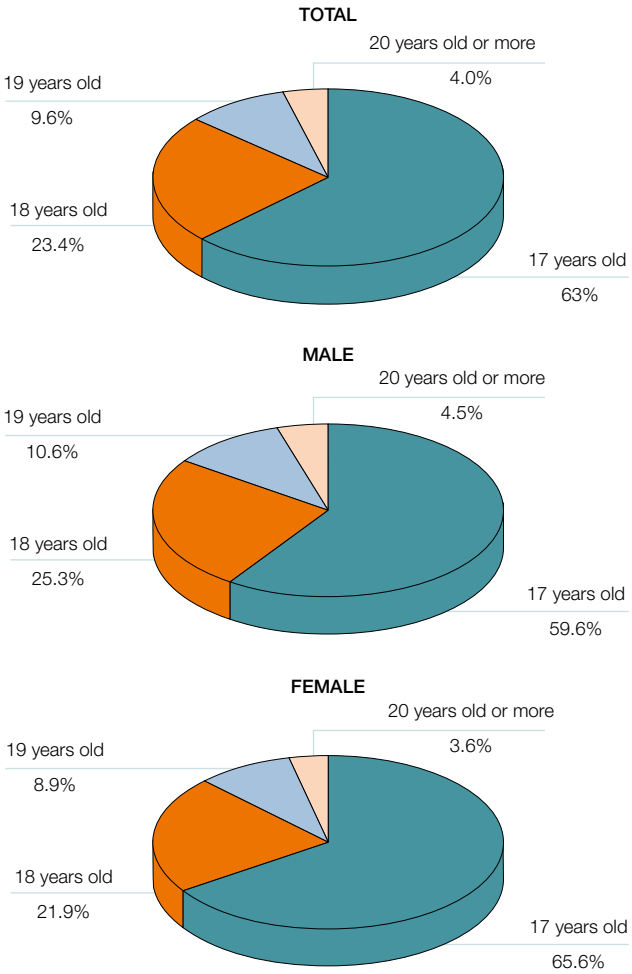
Table 2.17 shows the promotion rates of students by year in the baccalaureate broken down by autonomous community. Promotion at the end of the first year does not indicate complete success as students can be promoted to the second year having failed two subjects, but the promotion rate of the second year is equivalent to the graduation rate. In short, we can say that three of every four

students passes and results in the Basque Country, Navarre, La Rioja, Asturias and Aragon stand out, as well as the poorer results in the two archipelagos, Ceuta and Melilla, and Extremadura.

GRAPH 2.11

Percentage distribution by age and sex of students in the second year of the baccalaureate

Academic year 2006-2007



Source: Cifras de la Educación en España 2009, Ministry of Education, and author elaboration.

TABLE 2.17

Percentage of students in the baccalaureate that are promoted, by autonomous community

Academic year 2005-2006

	RATES		DIF. AC-NATIONAL	
	FIRST YEAR	SECOND YEAR	FIRST YEAR	SECOND YEAR
Total	**76.7**	**73.2**		
Andalusia	73.2	72.3	–3.5	–0.9
Aragon	81.1	76.3	4.4	3.1
Asturias	83.4	77.4	6.7	4.2
Balearic Islands	71.3	68.6	–5.4	–4.6
Basque Country	86.4	78.7	9.7	5.5
Canary Islands	74.2	68.2	–2.5	–5.0
Cantabria	73.7	69.8	–3.0	–3.4
Castilla and Leon	76.6	69.4	–0.1	–3.8
Castilla-La Mancha	77.7	69.8	1.1	–3.4
Catalonia	75.0	73.4	–1.7	0.2
Community of Valencia	76.7	77.1	–	3.9
Extremadura	74.2	68.0	–2.5	–5.2
Galicia	78.4	74.2	1.8	1.0
La Rioja	82.8	75.8	6.1	2.6
Madrid	78.9	74.5	2.2	1.3
Murcia	74.8	69.4	–1.9	–3.8
Navarre	85.3	78.5	8.6	5.3
Ceuta	68.7	62.2	–8.0	–11.0
Melilla	69.0	74.0	–7.7	0.8

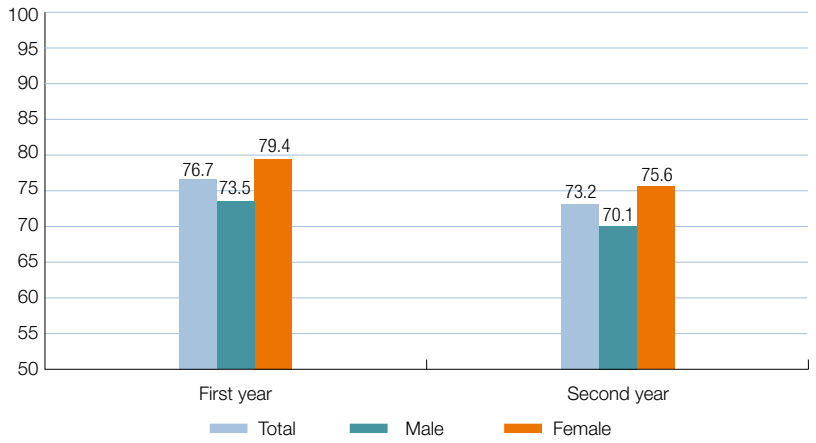
Note: Only includes student following the ordinary educational regime.
Source: Cifras de la Educación en España 2009 and author elaboration.

If we look at the differences by sex, Graph 2.12 reveals just what we expected: that not only do girls make up a larger proportion of the students, but a higher percentage are promoted, almost a difference of six percentage points (in the first year, 73.3 percent of male students are promoted in contrast to 79.4 percent among female students and in the seoncd year 70.1 percent of male students in comparison to 75.6 percent of female students). Regarding differences in promotion rates between public and private schools, Graph 2.13 reveals that the rate of promotion is 15 points higher in private schools than in public schools (87.7 percent versus 72.3 percent in the first year, and 84.2 percent versus 68.7 percent in the second year).

GRAPH 2.12

Percentage of students that are promoted in the baccalaureate by sex

Academic year 2005-2006

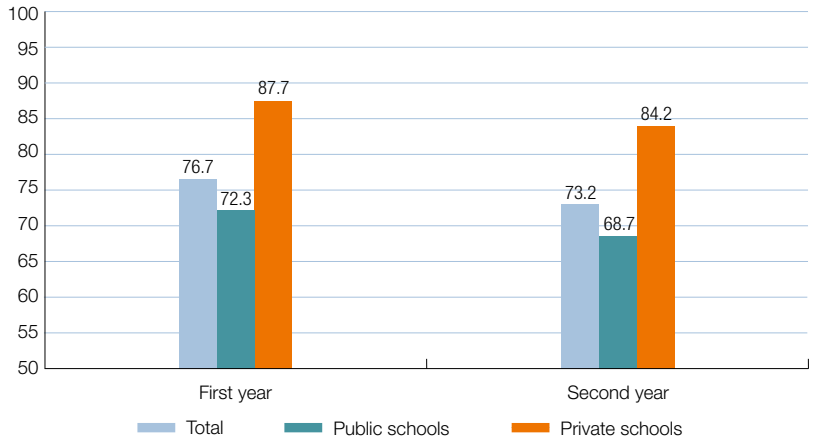


Note: Only includes student following the ordinary educational regime.
Source: Cifras de la Educación en España 2009 and author elaboration.

GRAPH 2.13

Percentage of students that are promoted in the baccalaureate by public or private school

Academic year 2005-2006



Note: Only includes student following the ordinary educational regime.
Source: Cifras de la Educación en España 2009 and author elaboration.

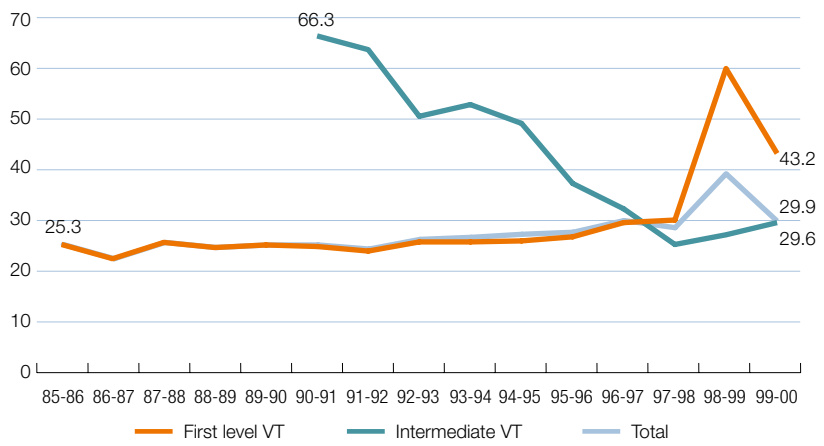
2.6. Vocational training cycles: neither sought nor utilized

We will take a look now at intermediate vocational training cycles. Graph 2.14 shows the evolution of the number of students enrolled and graduating, between 1985 and 2001, first from what was then known as the first level of vocational training (FP I) and then starting in 1990-1991, its substitute, intermediate vocational training cycles. The first thing that we notice is the relative stagnation in enrollment between 1985 and 1992, in contrast to the strong growth in the baccalaureate during the same period. Second is the low number of graduates in relation to enrollment. Of course it should be taken into account that every year one cohort graduates but two enroll, so that, if the figures are stable over time, the enrollment should double that of graduation. In addition, the number of graduates should not be compared with the enrollment in that academic year but with that of two years before. Even then, given that the enrollment first ascends and then descends in the period considered, and does so in a relatively gradual manner without leaps, it is not difficult to get a general idea of the low academic productivity of this stage.

GRAPH 2.14

Graduation rates in intermediate vocational training

1985-2000



Source: National Statistics Institute 2003.

Table 2.18 shows the distribution of students by age and by autonomous communities. As with the baccalaureate, those of 16 and 17 years of age are at the appropriate or ideal age, always and when they are in the second year of the cycle, while those that are 19 years of age are behind. The statistics available always refer to the overall two-year cycle, never to the individual years that make up the cycle separately, so that we do not insist on this, but it must be pointed out that the 48.9 percent of the students over 18 years of age, almost half the total, make up only a part of those that are behind, as this figure does not include those of 18 years of age that are still in the first year; in addition, it underestimates the group of students that are 19 years of age or older that are also still in the first year. To compensate for this it should be added that part of the reason students are behind is related to what happens in early educational stages, certainly in a proportion significantly greater than in the baccalaureate, because, as we will see, students that are behind in ESO but end up graduating have a greater tendency to choose vocational training over the baccalaureate.

Regarding the differences between communities in the table, the high levels of students that are behind in the Balearic Islands, Castilla and Leon, Galicia, the Basque Country and Melilla must be mentioned. Note, however, that the high number of students that exceed the ideal age in intermediate vocational training may be related not only to accumulated repetitions within the system, but also to the return of students after a period in the labour market or at home. Thus, this phenomenon may still refer to students that are behind but it also represents the recuperation of students that had left school.

Table 2.19 presents the percent of students that have repeated by sex and by type of school (public or private). We see that the percentage of repeaters is higher among male students than among female students, but with a smaller difference than we have seen in previous cases: less than three points higher. The rate of repetition is also lower in private schools than public ones, but by a minimum difference of six tenths of a percentage point. But we find ourselves in vocational training, up to a certain point still *a world of men and public school territory*.

Graph 2.15 closes out our picture of intermediate vocational training, presenting the percentage of graduates at this educational level over the total for the corresponding age cohort (in other words, the gross graduation rate)

for a somewhat more recent series than that presented earlier. The stagnation in this type of post compulsory education can be seen, in contrast to the baccalaureate, as well as its slower feminization, without this meaning that we do not see the common advantage of female students over male ones.

TABLE 2.18

Percentage distribution of students by age and autonomous community

Intermediate vocational training. Academic year 2006-2007

	16	17	18	19	20+	18+	DIF.
Spain	**5.5**	**19.9**	**25.8**	**17.8**	**31.1**	**48.9**	
Andalusia	5.7	24.5	27.4	16.7	25.7	42.4	–6.5
Aragon	4.3	19.5	29.1	19.7	27.3	47.0	–1.9
Asturias	1.9	9.5	23.5	21.8	43.2	65.0	16.1
Balearic Islands	5.4	20.0	25.8	16.8	32.1	48.9	–
Basque Country	2.0	10.7	21.7	19.8	45.7	65.5	16.6
Canary Islands	3.1	16.9	26.6	16.9	36.5	53.4	4.5
Cantabria	3.5	14.1	26.4	20.7	35.3	56.0	7.1
Castilla and Leon	2.5	10.5	24.2	22.0	40.8	62.8	13.9
Castilla-La Mancha	4.0	16.5	28.1	20.5	30.9	51.4	2.5
Catalonia	12.4	28.6	24.2	13.3	21.5	34.8	–14.1
Community of Valencia	5.1	24.9	26.3	15.8	27.9	43.7	–5.2
Extremadura	4.1	17.4	29.2	21.4	27.9	49.3	0.4
Galicia	2.2	9.5	21.4	20.6	46.3	66.9	18.0
La Rioja	5.5	18.3	24.5	17.8	33.9	51.7	2.8
Madrid	3.0	13.4	26.9	21.4	35.3	56.7	7.8
Murcia	5.2	19.7	27.6	17.8	29.7	47.5	–1.4
Navarre	9.8	27.0	29.1	16.0	18.1	34.1	–14.8
Ceuta	5.3	19.5	22.6	12.1	40.5	52.6	3.7
Melilla	1.2	17.9	18.1	13.2	49.6	62.8	13.9

Source: Cifras de la Educación en España 2009 and author elaboration.

TABLE 2.19

Rate of repetition by sex and type of school in intermediate vocational training

2005-2006

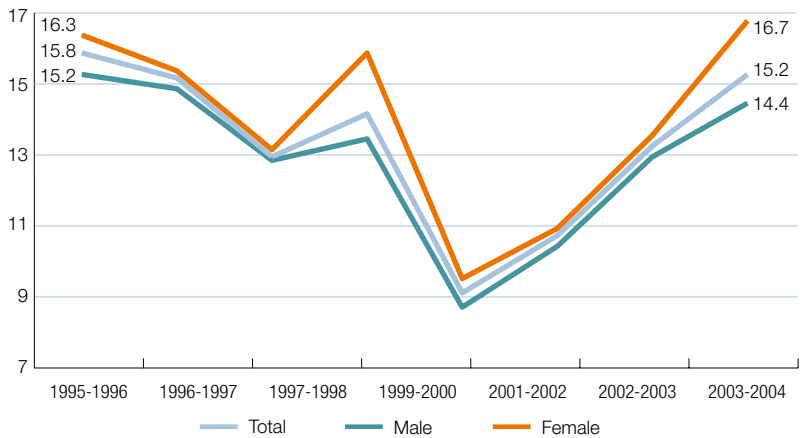
Rate of repetition	**Total**	**16.7**	All schools	16.7
	Male	18.2	Public	16.8
	Female	15.5	Private	16.2

Source: Non-university education statistics 2009 and author elaboration.

GRAPH 2.15

Gross graduation rate (%) in intermediate vocational training cycles by sex

1995-2004



Source: Institute of Evaluation: National system of education indicators 2006. *Graduation rates*

2.7. Balance on post compulsory education

If we put together the data on the baccalaureate and intermediate vocational training we obtain data on the totality of the initial level of post compulsory education, the level which the European Union set in Lisbon as attainable for 90 percent of the population. This is what is shown in Table 2.20 for the period 1990 to 2006, which presents the gross graduation rates for the baccalaureate and intermediate vocational training, which is the equivalent of the gross rate

for the population which obtains (at minimum) a post compulsory educational diploma or certificate. The first thing to note is the continual increase followed by a slight decrease in the last period in the gross rate for the baccalaureate, which overall increases almost 50 percent during the period being examined (from 33.1 to 45.2 percent), accompanied by the practical stagnation and even slight decline in intermediate vocational training (from 17.7 percent to 16.8 percent). However, this noticeable decline is offset by an increase in the last five years. The consolidated results from both branches is, therefore, a modest increase of 11.2 percentage points, situating the gross graduation rate for the academic year 2005-2006 at 62 percent, still very far from the objective set in Lisbon.

TABLE 2.20

Gross rate of the population that finishes the baccalaureate and intermediate vocational training

1990-2006

	BACCALAUREATE	INTERMEDIATE VOCATIONAL TRAINING	BACC. + VT
1990-91	33.1	17.7	50.8
1991-92	33.5	17.7	51.2
1992-93	35.4	18.3	53.7
1993-94	37.3	18.0	55.3
1994-95	39.0	17.3	56.3
1995-96	40.6	15.8	56.4
1996-97	41.7	15.1	56.8
1997-98	44.3	13.0	57.3
1998-99	45.9	14.3	60.2
1999-00	45.1	9.1	54.2
2000-01	46.8	10.9	57.7
2001-02	45.1	13.4	58.5
2002-03	46.1	15.4	61.5
2003-04	44.9	16.2	61.1
2004-05	44.4	16.4	60.8
2005-06	45.2	16.8	62.0

Source: Non-university education statistics 2009 and author elaboration.

In addition, we find the usual differences associated with gender, always in favor of female students. Their advantage almost doubles in the baccalaureate (from 8.5 percentage points in academic year 1990-1991 to 16.5 points in 2005-2006) and for overall post compulsory secondary education (from 10.2 percentage points in 1990-1991 to 19.2 in 2005-2006). In intermediate vocational training the difference is smaller, but also favours women (from 1.7 to 2.7 percent respectively), however, because female students make up a minority of these students, these results have little weight on the overall percentages.

TABLE 2.21

Gross rate of the population that finishes the baccalaureate and intermediate vocational training, by autonomous community

1990-2006

	BACCALAUREATE			INTERMEDIATE VOCATIONAL TRAINING		
	1990-1991	2005-2006	VARIATION	1990-1991	2005-2006	VARIATION
Spain	**33.1**	**45.2**	**12.1**	**17.7**	**16.8**	**–0.9**
Andalusia	30.4	39.2	8.8	16.2	19.3	3.1
Aragon	39.6	47.7	8.1	22.2	18.3	–3.9
Asturias	37.0	57.7	20.7	16.8	20.2	3.4
Balearic Islands	23.3	32.5	9.2	14.6	13.4	–1.2
Basque Country	39.4	65.2	25.8	14.0	21.6	7.6
Canary Islands	25.3	38.3	13.0	17.8	13.9	–3.9
Cantabria	29.9	48.7	18.8	22.1	21.7	–0.4
Castilla and Leon	38.0	53.5	15.5	17.7	19.5	1.8
Castilla-La Mancha	25.2	41.8	16.6	15.9	12.7	–3.2
Catalonia	31.1	45.8	14.7	22.8	16.9	–5.9
Community of Valencia	29.2	39.8	10.6	17.8	17.8	–
Extremadura	25.7	40.8	15.1	13.8	13.6	–0.2
Galicia	32.9	51.7	18.8	20.7	19.9	–0.8
La Rioja	42.1	47.9	5.8	25.2	20.5	–4.7
Madrid	44.4	52.1	7.7	13.5	11.8	–1.7
Murcia	27.7	39.4	11.7	19.7	11.7	–8.0
Navarre	35.5	52.3	16.8	23.0	20.6	–2.4
Ceuta	23.8	32.9	9.1	7.1	5.7	–1.4
Melilla	24.1	45.0	20.9	8.7	15.1	6.4

Source: Non-university education statistics 2009 and author elaboration.

Finally, Table 2.21 shows the gross rate for those that finish the baccalaureate and intermediate vocational training by autonomous communities, for the academic years at the beginning and end of the period examined (1990-1991 and 2005-2006 respectively), as they provide the most homogeneous data available. The period began with inequalities and ended with them also, but with different evolutionary processes. In the baccalaureate, for example, Andalusia and the Balearic Islands saw their initial disadvantage increase significantly, while on the opposite extreme, the Basque Country and Aragon saw their advantage in comparison to other autonomous communities increase. In the case of intermediate vocational training, the differences were and are much smaller and their territorial distribution is more erratic.

All the regions saw an increase in the rate of the population finishing the baccalaureate, but some more than others and with great differences between them: from the 7.7 point increase in Madrid to the 20.7 point increase in Asturias. These differences should be interpreted together, taking into account the starting point and the finishing point, or whichever of these and the variation. If the rate is very low, it would be easier to increase it through unitary state financing than if the rate is already a high one; although the same percentage increase from a low rate can represent a radical change, which would not happen starting from a higher rate. There are some notable increases, such as in the Basque Country, Asturias and Melilla, but they do not have the same significance because the initial and final rates are very different. Other increases are more modest, for example, those in La Rioja, Madrid and Aragon on the one hand, and Andalusia and Ceuta on the other, but as with the others just mentioned, they have different significance.

The final result is the now well-known and alarming position of Spain at the tail end of the European Union. Table 2.22 shows the net school enrollment rate for the population from 15 to 18 years of age in 19 countries of the European Union, those that are also a part of the OECD. The rates are similar at 15 years of age, reflecting an effective compulsory education, but the Spanish rate systematically drops in the following years until declining to 70 percent for those that are 18 years of age, from ten to twenty points below the majority of countries, and only above our usual fellow travelers, Portugal – Greece is for once, situated above us – and the United Kingdom.

TABLE 2.22

Net school enrollment rates from 15 to 18 years of age, for EU countries

Academic year 2005-2006

	15	16	17	18
Austria	96.5	93.7	93.0	78.3
Belgium	100	100	100	91.1
Czech Republic	100.0	100.0	96.1	86.9
Denmark	95.7	90.7	84.0	80.0
Finland	99.4	96.4	95.7	94.0
France	97.5	96.6	92.0	78.8
Germany	98.2	96.9	92.2	85.6
Greece	92.7	100.0	87.1	90.4
Hungary	98.4	95.9	92.3	82.2
Ireland	100	97.2	88.5	89.5
Italy	93.5	88.8	83.1	85.6
Luxembourg	87.8	84.2	77.1	70.1
Netherlands	99.2	98.0	91.8	81.9
Poland	98.2	97.4	95.5	93.6
Portugal	91.2	82.0	73.2	66.7
Slovakia	99.0	94.8	90.6	82.4
Spain	98.7	93.1	82.9	70.0
Sweden	98.5	99.3	97.7	94.6
United Kingdom	99.6	86.5	72.6	47.9

Source: Cifras de la Educación en España 2009 and author elaboration.

Graph 2.16 shows a comparison of the figures for school dropouts in the European Union and Spain and reveals that we have double the percentage of dropouts, 31 percent versus 15.2 percent. What is worse is that the drop out rate has continued to grow in the last decade, from and to higher figures, while other countries of the EU have demonstrated that it is possible to reduce the number of dropouts even when starting from lower figures.

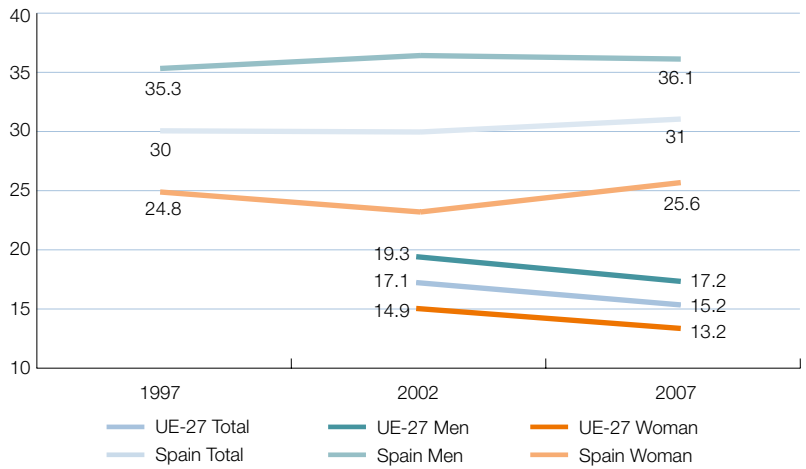
Table 2.23 shows the consequences of dropping out of school early in regards to workforce qualifications, concretely the proportion of young people from 20 to 24 years of age that have at minimum completed the second stage of secondary education, whether academic or vocational. Spain is situated 17

points behind the European average and losing positions (in five years it has lost 2.6 points, while the European Union has gained 1.4 points).

GRAPH 2.16

Early dropout rate (EU and Spain)

Percentage of the population between 18 and 24 years of age that has not completed the second stage of secondary education and is not studying or doing any type of training



Source: Cifras de la Educación en España 2009. EU Indicators – Points of reference 2010. Author elaboration.

TABLE 2.23

Educational and training level of the youth population (EU and Spain)

Percentage of the population from 20 to 24 years of age that has completed, at minimum, the second stage of Secondary Education

		1997	2002	2007
European Union (27 countries)	**Total**	**–**	**76.7**	**78.1**
	Men	–	74.0	75.5
	Women	–	79.3	80.8
Spain	**Total**	**63.7**	**63.7**	**61.1**
	Men	58.1	57.4	55.1
	Women	69.3	70.3	67.3

(1) EU structural indicator, used as a point of reference for the EU 2010 Objectives in Education and Training.
(2) Due to the implementation of harmonized concepts and definitions, these figures do not coincide with data published before December 2005.
Source: Labour Force Survey - Annual average 2007. Eurostat. EU indicators. Point of reference 2010.

III. The risk of failure

Leaving or dropping out of the educational system is a personal decision, the end result of a gradual process of *disengagement* which reveals itself as complex and multifaceted. Dropping out is, in addition, the culmination of a path of resistance to participation in the educational system. In personal terms, the process of failure at school tends to be understood by its protagonists as a combination to a greater or lesser degree of two ingredients: disinterest and difficulty.

Disinterest in studies and the difficulty in keeping up adequately with them are clearly related, although it may not be possible to know if one is the cause of the other or vice versa. What we do know and what interests us here are, first, that these factors are not uniformly distributed among the school population; secondly, they are the central element in a process of leaving the school system which includes falling behind, poor grades, lack of attention, indiscipline and absenteeism; and third, they are integrated and accepted by primary and secondary students as an acceptable mental model in their passage through the educational system. Starting in this chapter we will examine each of these aspects in the drop out process separately. First, here we will look at the factors which increase the risk of students dropping out and in the following chapters we will look at the process that leads to it and then how the experience is seen by the very students that take this road to school failure.

Success and failure in the educational system are linked to students' personal and social characteristics. Failure at school – just as with other results of passage through the educational system – is not evenly distributed among the students from different social strata; rather it is embedded in a complex network of mutual relations related to aspects of the personal life of the

students that are both internal and external to the actual educational system. There are several characteristics of the process of leaving school that should be taken into account in trying to understand it. The first and most basic is that *it is not completely connected* to students' results in school. With equal grades or results, decisions to drop out are more frequent among students with certain personal characteristics and of certain social origins (Grañeras et al., 1998; Calero, 2007). Individual educational results are only a partial predictor of continuity in the system: poor results can influence the decision to drop out, but not all students with poor results drop out, so the decision is linked to factors other than just results. We could interpret poor results as a symptom of the process of disengaging and not necessarily the reason for it.

The second characteristic is that the distinct factors that affect failure are articulated in a complex manner. There is no single factor but rather various ones. In this section we will look at the role of four factors whose influence has been shown to be determinant: social origin, sex, belonging to a minority or the experience of migration and belonging to dysfunctional families. To analyze each one of these factors we will use three different sources of data: the 2005 ETEFIL (Encuesta de Trayectorias Formativas y Laborales [Survey on the Transition from Education/Training to Labour Market Insertion]), the Spanish data from the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and the results from the analysis of student records from a sample of schools. The details regarding these sources of data can be found in the *Methodological Appendix*.

3.1. Social origin: economic and social capital

The factor with the greatest weight in the process of leaving the educational system is a student's social class. This has been shown to be true over a long period of time and in different countries and it is a factor resistant to the most significant attempts to introduce principles of equality in the system (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993; Goldthorpe, 2000). Social origin is not the only factor in students dropping out or in failure; however, its influence on results (for example, on the PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS tests)[1] and on decisions about the

(1) TIMSS: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study; PIRLS: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study. Both are comparative studies of educational achievement carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

educational paths to follow is well known. The likelihood of a student going on to higher education is six times greater for middle-class children than for working class children (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993: 35).

This fact is not noticed by many of the participants in the system, as students tend to be placed in classrooms that are relatively homogeneous in regards to social origin. For many teachers, the causes of poor results, the lack of discipline and dropping out are to be found in parents and students' attitudes, as well as in the capacity of the system itself to provide them with the attention needed. In the vision of the school, social differences are distorted by the fact that student diversity is seen as a reality bounded by the internal diversity of the school itself. The experiences of the participants in the schools in this way take on a casuistic character, which permits the depth of the causes to be understood but not their distribution, and this makes it difficult to be aware of the specific weight of social origin in educational results. In addition, we all tend to assign the origin of problems to factors over which we have a certain control, and the social origin of the students is certainly not such a factor.

However, if we look at the results of the PISA, around 50 percent of the differences in school performance can be attributed to causes directly related to social origin, while another 20 percent can be explained by the social composition of the school and only 7 percent by strictly pedagogical and organizational factors (Pajares Box, 2002; Entorf and Minoiu, 2005). What's more, differences between public and private schools vanish in the Spanish case, when we focus on the differences in the social composition of the students (OCDE, 2005: 161 and ss.).

To what degree does social origin have an affect on educational results? The overwhelming conclusion from the data may be surprising, although existing sources are not recent, nor do they provide detailed information regarding social class, or permit a comparison between students who have recently dropped out with those that have stayed in the educational system, as there are not a sufficient number of cases.

To analyze the levels of school failure we have used data from the 2003 PISA questionnaire. We have found three different indicators for failure at school and they have been combined to represent the overall dropout risk.

- The first indicator is the repetition rate, given that, as will be shown in the following chapter, repetition is strongly associated with dropping out of school (Rumberger, 1995; CES, 2009: 25). Note that in this case this is not an indicator of age adequacy; rather it refers to the fact of having repeated an academic year or not.
- The second indicator provides us with the number of students that aspire to complete some level of post-secondary education. In the questionnaire students were also asked if they intended to finish ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education), and almost all students surveyed answered that question affirmatively, despite the high dropout rates already known. Only 0.6 percent of the total stated that finishing primary school was sufficient.
- The third indicator is constructed using the results from the evaluation of competencies by the PISA. In this programme the basic objective is to evaluate the knowledge of the students in various subjects through a focus on competencies. Starting from the average grades obtained on each subject, all those students that are more than one standard deviation below the average in at least two of the four areas of competencies measured by the project's test are considered to have a high risk of failure. This measure permits us to add information about academic results to the risks of failure. Poor results, in addition, tend to lead to effective abandonment in function of the behaviour of external variables, such as the ones analyzed in this chapter.
- The fourth indicator is a combination of the other three. Considered to be at a high risk of dropping out of school are those that meet two or more of the previous conditions for being at risk, but always including all those that have the explicit intention of not continuing studies after finishing ESO. It must be taken into account in examining the PISA data that a proportion of secondary school students that drop out do so before the application of the test, therefore a small proportion of the student population – but with extreme characteristics, having dropped out of the system before legal age – that drops out of school is not included.

Table 3.1 shows the proportion of students for each one of the indicators mentioned, by the occupational class of their parents.

TABLE 3.1

Indicators of school failure according to occupational class of the parents

In percentages

	HIGHEST OCCUPATIONAL CLASS OF THE PARENTS			
	SKILLED/ WHITE COLLAR	UNSKILLED / WHITE COLLAR	SKILLED /MANUAL LABOUR	UNSKILLED/MANUAL LABOUR
Have repeated an academic year	18.4	30.1	37.6	36.2
Do not aspire to post secondary levels of education	6.9	12.8	23.5	23.1
Score below one standard deviation	10.4	16.6	27.6	28.8
High risk of failure	22.7	35.6	46.3	44.8

Source: Pisa 2003 and author elaboration.

Despite the reclassification of occupation being that proposed by the PISA team, it does not include all the indicators of social class or the complexity of class structures, but it is sufficient to indicate characteristics that reveal the association between class and failure at school that we want to note here. As can be seen, the differences between the two groups within manual labour are barely significant, probably due to the coding criteria used. In reality, in two of the first three indicators, and in the fourth, which is a composite, the risks of failure at school are higher among students whose parents are skilled manual workers than among those whose parents are unskilled. However, the classification in future studies should be revised, because the occupational group of unskilled manual workers used by the PISA team includes very different occupations, while the white-collar occupational group is more uniform regarding social class. Regardless, the association between social origin and school failure can be clearly seen. Regarding the risk revealed by the composite variable, 22.7 percent of middle class students are at a high risk of school failure in comparison to 45 percent among working class students. These differences are clear in regards to aspirations to complete post-secondary levels of educations (three times less among students whose parents work at unskilled manual labour) and regarding the proportion of students with test results of their competencies one standard deviation below the average.

In Table 3.2 the same data are examined but focusing on the distribution based on the maximum educational level reached by the parents. Again, the differences are clear; almost half of the students whose parents have no education have repeated an academic year, while among the children of the university educated repeating affects only 16.3 percent. The same occurs with aspirations for post secondary education (39.8 percent of students whose parents have no education do not aspire to a post secondary education, in comparison with only 5.1 percent among those whose parents have completed higher education) and, above all, with the scores obtained on the PISA test that measures students' competencies (43 percent of students with parents with no education receiving scores one standard deviation below the average compared to only 9.7 percent receiving such scores among students with parents that have completed university studies). Taken together, the risks of dropping out of school and failure affect 63 percent of the children of parents without education and 20 percent of the children of parents with university or graduate degrees.

TABLE 3.2

Indicators of school failure according to parents' educational level

In percentages

	MAXIMUM EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF PARENTS						
	NONE	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	VOCATIONAL	BACCALAUREATE	UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE	FOUR YEAR/ GRADUATE UNIV. DEGREES
Have repeated	48.2	37.8	25.5	24.1	29.5	27.7	16.3
Do not aspire to post secondary education	39.8	23.8	13.3	13.0	13.1	8.2	5.1
Score below one standard deviation	43.0	26.7	15.8	17.3	17.8	14.5	9.7
High risk of failure	62.9	46.2	31.8	31.0	35.0	33.1	20.2

Source: PISA 2003 and author elaboration.

We can see that the relationship between parents' educational level and school failure is clear, in the sense that the higher the educational level of the parents, the lower is the level of school failure among the children. This association breaks down however at the middle educational levels (secondary education,

baccalaureate, vocational training), given that at these levels there are no significant differences found with any of the indicators.

But up to what point do these risks effectively lead to students dropping out? To respond to this question we use the ETEFIL (Survey on the Transition from Education/Training to Labour Market Insertion). According to Table 3.3, which shows the distribution of those who drop out of school before completing compulsory education by the educational level of the parents, three fourths of dropouts are children of parents without education or whose maximum educational level reached is compulsory education, which in the ages corresponding to the sample refers to primary school. The remaining one fourth of students that dropout have parents with higher educational levels.

TABLE 3.3

Educational level of parents of students that drop out without finishing ESO

MAXIMUM EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF PARENTS	PERCENTAGE OF THOSE THAT DROP OUT OF ESO	PERCENTAGE OF THOSE THAT DO NOT DROP OUT
Without education	20.7	7.0
Compulsory	56.4	41.3
Baccalaureate	10.1	14.9
Vocational	7.0	12.2
University	5.8	24.6

Source: ETEFIL 2005 and author elaboration.

Once compulsory secondary education is finished, students basically have three options: conclude their formal education, begin the baccalaureate or begin some type of vocational training. The first is clearly a minority option, which is not to say that the proportion that does not pursue any post-secondary studies is negligible. Around three fourths of the students decide to pursue a baccalaureate, one fifth begin vocational training and one of every twenty decide to drop out at this point (based on the data from the 2005 ETEFIL).

However, four years later, educational results do not correspond to this distribution of decisions. Table 3.4 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of different groups of students that left ESO in 2001. 60.4 percent finished the baccalaureate and of these some continued further studies and others

no. 6.4 percent tried the baccalaureate and dropped out at some point in the following four years, while 8.3 percent were still studying, either for the baccalaureate or pursuing a vocational training at the time of the survey (at the end of the four years). 16 percent received a vocational training certificate and 3.8 percent tried to but dropped out. This means that the probability of failing in post-compulsory vocational training is double (18.9 percent) that for the baccalaureate (9.5 percent). The 4.8 percent remaining abandoned their studies upon finishing compulsory secondary education. In elaborating this information we did not take into account changes from the baccalaureate to vocational training or vice versa, nor incorporations into these programmes after the 2001-2002 school year: they are strictly the results after four years, in other words, at the end of the 2004-2005 academic year.

TABLE 3.4

Maximum educational level of parents of those that finish ESO based on their subsequent trajectories

In percentages

	DO NOT INITIATE POST COMPULSORY STUDIES	FAIL		CONTINUE		GRADUATE		TOTAL
		BACC.	VT	BACC.	VT	BACC.	VT	
Without education	19.6	12.4	18.4	6.9	7.4	4.3	9.4	**7.0**
Compulsory	59.6	53.2	54.0	41.8	43.7	34.7	54.0	**41.3**
Baccalaureate	9.0	14.2	12.1	18.1	14.8	15.7	12.9	**14.9**
Vocational	6.8	9.8	8.5	12.0	19.3	12.5	13.5	**12.2**
University	5.0	10.5	7.0	21.2	14.8	32.7	10.1	**24.6**

Note: The data from the first column comes from a different sample; therefore a horizontal reading of the table should not be made.
Source: ETEFIL 2005 and author elaboration.

Again, the influence of social origin on results is patent regarding the different levels of post-compulsory study achieved (table 3.4). The children of parents without education represent 7 percent of the total sample, divided among: those that complete the baccalaureate, 4.3 percent; those that do not continue after compulsory secondary education, 19.6 percent, and those that do not successfully complete vocational training, 18.4 percent. This pattern is not limited to the children of parents without education, which could be considered a group that is, in a certain manner, very distant from the educational system.

The differences in opportunities for success appear between those that have parents that completed compulsory education and those with parents with post-compulsory education. It should be noted that those with most success in vocational training are precisely the children of parents with certificates in vocational training or from industrial master schools.

In the information extracted from the school records (see the Methodological Appendix) we find a similar pattern to that which we have been describing. Unfortunately, this data is subject to two major restrictions. The first is that it is a sample of cases of students administratively classified as drop outs, so that these cases are not helpful as a way of seeing how school failure is distributed in the general student population, instead, the information is limited to the period in which students drop out. Secondly, the information on social class of origin (based on occupational group or parental education) is only available in one fourth of the cases. For this reason, we have classified parents' occupational group into three large groups: professionals, small business owners and non-manual labour, and manual workers and economically inactive.(2) Although the classification is not perfect, it fulfils the function of indicating the most relevant differences from the data. Given that the students whose records contain complete information that drop out from intermediate vocational training and so-called social guarantee programmes (SGP) are very few, the students who drop out have been grouped into three groups based on the educational cycle in which they occur. As can be seen in Table 3.5, these categories reveal important differences.

(2) We start from the classification of social classes used in *Las desigualdades en la educación en España* [Inequalities in Education in Spain] (Muñoz-Repiso *et al*., 1992), a reference work for the analysis of educational inequalities related to class, used in other studies such as Calero and Bonal (1999). This classification differentiates five classes: capitalists (employers), small business owners (business owners without employees), supervising middle-class (self-employed professionals, executives, department heads), subordinate middle-class (administrative and salespersons, supervisors, members of the armed forces) and working class. We have renamed the categories, eliminating the capitalists (there were no children of capitalists among those who dropped out of school prematurely) and placed small business owners who do have employees in the category of small business owners. The resulting categories and their equivalents from the referred to classification are the following four: Professional-executive or, simply professionals (supervising middle-class), small business owners, non-manual workers (subordinate middle-class) and manual workers (working class). Another category also appears in the data: those who are considered homemakers or pensioners, referred to as economically inactive. The grouping of these five categories into three is done on the basis of the behavior of the children that drop out of school prematurely, very similar among the working class and the economically inactive, and small business owners and non-manual workers.

TABLE 3.5

Educational cycle in which student dropped out grouped by social class

In percentages

	SOCIAL CLASS			TOTAL
	PROFESSIONALS	SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS AND NON MANUAL WORKERS	MANUAL WORKERS AND INACTIVE	
ESO I Cycle and SGP	3.3*	6.2*	25.7	**15.3**
ESO II Cycle	10.0*	43.2	34.3	**34.3**
Bacc./Int VT	86.7	50.6	40.0	**50.5**

Source: Sample based on student records of students that dropped out in 2008 (* n<10).

The data indicate that failure at school is more frequent among children of un-skilled manual workers, who make up about 30 percent of the total of those who fail at school. However, the total weight of the rest of the social groups should be taken into account so that the concentration of failure by class can be analyzed. We should emphasize that 9 percent of the cases are students with a single parent who is economically inactive (this group being primarily made up of women). Though this group does not fit in the normal classification, it exhibits a similar behaviour to that of the group of manual workers and therefore the two groups are placed together.

If we focus on the period in which students dropped out of school for each social class (the horizontal percentages in table 3.5), we can differentiate three patterns:

- A large proportion of the children of manual workers, both skilled and un-skilled, that drop out do so during the second cycle of compulsory secondary education, although dropping out is also frequent in the first cycle. The result is that 60 percent of the children of manual workers that drop out of school do not finish compulsory education.
- The children of small business owners and non-manual workers follow a very similar pattern: few dropouts in the first cycle of ESO and many in the second cycle. The end result is that 49 percent of these students dropouts before completing compulsory education.

- The children of professionals are those with the most differentiated pattern, with very low proportions of failure in the two compulsory cycles. Only 13 percent of this group does not complete compulsory education.

In addition to these distributions by class origin, the level of education of the parents is also considered a reliable predictor of school failure (Calero, 2007; Martínez, 2007).[3] Despite the available data not covering even one fourth of our base, we can see the coherent trends that we have commented on regarding social classes. In Table 3.6 we see the school cycle in which abandonment took place by the educational levels of the father and mother analyzed separately.

In general terms, the children of mothers and fathers with compulsory education or below make up the majority of students that fail at school (74 percent if we look at the educational level of the father, 71 percent if we look at the educational level of the mother). The rest of the cases are divided almost equally among children with parents that completed the baccalaureate, a vocational training or that have a university degree. From this data we can state that having a parent with a post-compulsory educational degree or certificate (of whatever type) greatly improves the educational success of children in secondary school, and this positive influence is greater when the holder of the degree or certificate is the father.

TABLE 3.6

Educational cycle in which students dropped out by parents' educational level

In percentatges

PERIOD IN WHICH STUDENT DROPPED OUT	FATHER'S EDUCATIONAL LEVEL			MOTHER'S EDUCATIONAL LEVEL		
	COMPULSORY OR BELOW	POST COMPULSORY	TOTAL	COMPULSORY OR BELOW	POST COMPULSORY	TOTAL
ESO I C and SGP	15.6	7.1*	**13.4**	15.9	5.9*	**13.0**
ESO II C	41.0	26.2	**37.2**	42.1	29.4	**38.4**
Bacc. and VT	43.4	66.7	**49.4**	42.1	64.7	**48.6**

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008 (* n<10).

(3) In reality, part of the predictive capacity of educational level of the parents is included in the information on the social class of the parents.

The analysis by cycles shows that in the first cycle of ESO, students who drop out of school are overwhelmingly the children of parents with only a compulsory education or below (90 percent based on the educational level of the father, and 95 percent based on that of the mother). In the second cycle this pattern is maintained though lightly attenuated, with percentages of 82 percent and 78 percent respectively. In other words, the children of fathers that did not complete compulsory education or received no education beyond compulsory education make up a total of 84 percent of the students that do not finish ESO, and in regards to the same educational level for mothers, they make up 80 percent. In contrast, well over 60 percent of the children of parents with post compulsory educational levels that drop out of school do so after having successfully completing compulsory education. In the specific case of the children of parents with university degrees 87 percent complete compulsory education before dropping out. Again, the border is situated between parents that have a compulsory educational level or below and those that completed a post compulsory degree or certificate. The students with the best results are those whose parents have university degrees, the vast majority successfully completing compulsory education (although they may subsequently drop out during post compulsory education).

3.2. Girls' success: gender and failure at school

That girls are more successful in school is not a great discovery. Their access to all the levels of the educational system and the comparative advantage derived from their better performance constitutes, perhaps, the best investment in a system of stratification (Buchmann, DiPetre y McDaniel, 2007). The reasons for this success are not completely clear; possibly the most reasonable assumption is that the process of development during puberty favours the maintenance of discipline, focus and work habits among girls to a greater extent than among boys (Harris, 1998). However, there are other important reasons to assume that a part of the difference is due to socialization processes for different roles, as we can assume that the socialization of girls leads to less conflictive behaviour on their part in comparison to boys. There are also reasons to think that the acquisition of skills related to the earlier maturation of girls, such as those related to language (GilVerona *et al*., 2002), have a broader and more general application in learning processes than do spatial or formal reasoning.

Table 3.7 shows the different indicators of the risk for dropping out of school for the students surveyed in the PISA study by sex. The advantage of the girls is clear for all of the indicators, although not to the same degree in each case. For example, the probability of repeating an academic year is ten points greater for the boys than for the girls, and the proportion that does not aspire to obtain a post compulsory educational degree is eight points higher for the boys. The scores on the test of competencies, as is known (Pajares Box, 2002), are slightly higher for girls, but not enough to explain the differences in the other predictors for school failure. Taken together, no less than 40 percent of the boys are in situations of potential failure in comparison to 29 percent of the girls. Although we now know that there is not a direct connection from poor results or difficulty and school failure, in this case we can see clearly that the response to poor results is different depending on sex.

TABLE 3.7

Indicators for the risk of dropping out by sex of student

In percentages

		SEX	
		GIRLS	BOYS
Have repeated	Of each sex	42.0	58.0
	Of the group	23.7	33.8
Do not aspire to post secondary education	Of each sex	38.1	61.9
	Of the group	10.8	18.2
Score below one standard deviation	Of each sex	43.3	56.7
	Of the group	16.1	21.7
High risk of failure	Of each sex	42.7	57.3
	Of the group	29.4	40.7

Source: PISA 2003 and author elaboration.

The difference in the rates of repetition between the sexes is quite high. The boys, when they fail, do so sooner and with worse results. But aspirations are also distributed differently, and this requires a different interpretation. Among those that do not aspire to an education beyond ESO, *only* 38.1 percent are girls, from which it can be deduced that with similar educational results girls are less likely to look outside the educational system.

In table 3.8 we see the proportion of male and female students in each of the destinations subsequent to leaving ESO; we have included the distribution by sex of those who drop out during ESO to make a comparative analysis possible. It can be seen that the end results are more similar as age increases. While among the youngest students the proportion of boys that fail at school is greater, among those that continue studying after ESO, the differences between boys and girls decrease. For every 100 boys that begin the baccalaureate, 11.7 do not finish it or continue studying after four years; in contrast, for girls this number is 7 for every 100. The difference in ESO is greater, almost double. A clearer understanding of the differences between male and female students can be seen in the column of those that do not initiate studies after ESO. Although the proportion of boys is somewhat higher, the differences are much less than regarding those that do not complete ESO. This follows a gender pattern pointed out in previous studies: in comparing the moment when boys and girls drop out of school, girls have a greater tendency to do so upon finishing a cycle and boys in the middle of a cycle. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that girls tend more toward leaving school and less toward failure in a strict sense and vice versa.

TABLE 3.8

Educational flows by sex

In percentages

	GROUP							
	DO NOT FINISH ESO	DO NOT INITIATE POST SEC.	FAIL		CONTINUE	FINISH		TOTAL
			BACC.	VT		BACC.	VT CYCLES	
Boys	65.9	54.8	54.2	63.4	53.4	43.0	53.6	**47.6**
% that		5.5	7.3	5.1	9.3	54.6	18.3	
Girls	34.1	45.2	45.8	36.6	46.6	57.0	46.4	**52.4**
% that		4.1	5.6	2.7	7.4	65.8	14.4	

Note: The data corresponding to those that drop out of ESO come from a different sample, therefore the absolute numbers cannot be compared with the rest of the groups, nor are they included in the total. Only read the percentages vertically.
Source: ETEFIL 2005 and author elaboration.

The analysis of the school records allows us to go deeper into these patterns, although the differences are not that striking (53 percent of all the cases of student dropouts – at all levels – are boys). We can analyze these differences

further if we focus on their distribution based on the period in which students drop out, as we can see in Table 3.9.

TABLE 3.9

Cycle in which students drop out by sex

In percentages

PERIOD IN WHICH STUDENTS DROP OUT	SEX	
	BOYS	GIRLS
ESO I Cycle and SGP	62.1	37.9
ESO II Cycle	53.1	46.9
Bacc. and Int. VT	50.9	49.1
Total	**53.2**	**46.8**

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

We see that boys drop out of school with greater frequency in all the educational cycles. An overall pattern should be noted, that the tendency to drop out is higher among boys at younger ages. The fact that dropout rates are higher among boys than girls is in addition to the fact that boys drop out in worse conditions in at least two ways: they drop out earlier and, as a consequence, they do not receive degrees or qualifications which aid them in their eventual integration in the labour market. As we will see later, dropping out of the educational system is more closely linked to the labour market for boys than is dropping out among girls.

3.3. Ethnicity and nationality

It is well-known that there are higher levels of early school abandonment in certain communities that maintain strong ties to their own traditions. The case of Gypsies is paradigmatic for its extreme characteristics (Fernández Enguita, 1999). Despite there being no one specifically identified as belonging to this group in our main sources, in many Gypsy communities and families dropping out of the educational system at 14 or 15 years of age or even earlier is taken for granted. This pattern is strongly associated with the idea that Gypsies have of the role of the school, and is an enormous obstacle in their schooling. Later, in analyzing interviews, we can examine this phenomenon more closely.

Another factor which increases the possibility of school failure is being a foreigner, and more concretely an immigrant from Southern countries. Their educational difficulties are known, although the causes of said difficulties are not (Colectivo Ioé, 2002). One possible hypothesis is that it is not being a foreigner which is determinant but rather, the social class of foreign students. From this perspective, immigrant students constitute an extreme version of the problems of failure at school of certain social strata as their parents work in manual labour or service sectors holding low-skill jobs. However, as we will see, this explanation fails when we analyze social class more closely: immigrant students in general obtain worse school results than native Spanish students of the same social class, although the same mechanisms of exclusion or self-exclusion that have an influence on the drop out rate of students from poorer families would appear to be at work.

There is another explanation based on three aspects of the immigrant experience which, combined, multiply their effect. The first is that the very migratory process, with its personal costs, it cultural relocation and consequent disorientation, has a particularly high cost for adolescent students. However, such circumstances do not constitute the only explanation, as foreign students from Northern countries live through a similar process but with very different educational results. The second is a specific form of cultural alienation produced by language. Not speaking the native language fluently can have very harmful effects on schooling. However, this effect does not have to be long term, and the process of learning the language in which a student is schooled is surprisingly rapid. The literature in the United States on pedagogy provides many examples of this process, much studied in a country which receives a lot of immigrants, and even points out the positive effects of bilingualism. Unless the impact of the initial shock is too great, in principle students from outside the country should be able to adapt to the classroom as well as autochthonous students (Fernández Enguita and Terrén, 2008; García Castaño, Rubio and Bouachra, 2008).

The third explanation is that foreign students bring with them the educational processes of their countries of origin, meaning what they have learned, specific cultural levels and competencies. As is well known, there is a direct though not completely understood relation between development and learning

levels. The concrete mechanisms are not completely known, but they depend on various aspects of the society of origin: the cultural level of the general population, that of the parents, the capacity of the system to offer a complete and quality education and, fundamentally, the quality of primary school. All these aspects, along with working methods and relations with different teachers, determine that many immigrant students, and especially those from southern countries, arrive with reduced learning capacities. From this perspective, the potential for success of immigrant students in the Spanish educational system should be similar to that in their system of origin, qualified by the difficulties in adaptation to a new model, by the *pre-selection* related to class, fruit of the fact that migration is not an equally likely choice for all social sectors in the society of origin, and by the tendency toward cultural isolation typical of many migrant communities.

All these explanations are filtered by the differences between native students, second generation immigrants and those born outside of Spain. The effects of linguistic and cultural problems, as well as those related to issues of coexistence, should disappear among second generation immigrants – if we are permitted an oxymoron – but not those born outside of Spain. Table 3.10 shows the differences for each one of the indicators of risk of failure at school among native students, second generation immigrants and those born outside the country, based on PISA data from 2003. If among the children of immigrants born in Spain the risk of repeating is similar to that of native Spanish, probably qualified by selection in function of social class – in reality, it is lower than among the lowest skilled sectors of the working class–, among non-natives it is 35.3 percent. In other words, more than one third of immigrant students of 15 years of age have repeated an academic year, in comparison to 27 percent for the total population. However, the distribution based on level of aspiration to complete post secondary studies is similar for those born outside of Spain and those born in Spain, while the percentage of students with scores one standard deviation below the average is much higher among non-native students. In general terms, the children of immigrants (a very small part of the 2003 PISA sample) reveal a similar rate of risk of dropping out of school as do working class Spanish students. In contrast, those born outside of Spain combine high rates of repetition and particularly low scores on the objective tests. The panorama is interesting, given that it implies that although the

aspirations of non-native students in the educational system are as high as native students, their competencies are not.

TABLE 3.10

Indicators of risk of failure by origin

In percentages

	ORIGIN		
	NATIVE	SECOND GENERATION	NON NATIVE
Have repeated	28.3	31.7	35.3
Do not aspire to post secondary education	14.3	26.6	15.0
Score below one standard deviation	18.0	23.8	37.6
High risk of failure	34.1	40.9	55.1

Source: PISA 2003 and author elaboration.

It seems clear, therefore, that second generation immigrant students are subject to the same pressures that lead to failure at school and abandonment as native students, and that differences are explained, above all, by social origin. A secondary interpretation of this pattern suggests that it is cultural differences, assimilated by the children, which generate the difficulties. One important indicator of these differences is speaking a different language at home from that which is the vernacular. Table 3.11 shows the risk of dropping out of school according to the language spoken at home. Note that the number of cases of adolescents that speak a foreign language at home is low; therefore it is difficult to analyze what languages they speak. Of the indicators of risk, only that which refers to test performance indicates a significant difference. In other words, students that speak a different language at home from that in school have greater difficulties in completing tests or of maximizing learning, but these differences do not translate into greater risk of dropping out as measured by disillusionment – lower aspirations –, nor in having to repeat courses – the proportion of said students that repeat an academic year actually being lower. It must be taken into account that we are not distinguishing between migrants from the South, North or East, as the size of the sample does not make it advisable to do so.

TABLE 3.11

Indicators of risk of failure by language spoken at home

In percentages

	LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME	
	A VERNACULAR LANGUAGE	A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
Have repeated	28.7	21.4
Do not aspire to post secondary education	14.4	14.6
Score below one standard deviation	18.6	29.3
High risk of failure	34.9	35.9

Source: PISA 2003 and author elaboration.

In the analysis of school records we also find difficulties among students of national or ethnic origin different from the majority. The guidance departments of the schools gather information regarding student ethnic origin. Unfortunately, this is sensitive information which is difficult to access, thus, we were only able to gather such information in only about half of the cases in our database. We identified 11 students who belong to an ethnic minority, all of them being Gypsies and all of them having dropped out of school during the first cycle of ESO.

Regarding nationality of origin, we have gathered together student cases from 22 different countries, which is 10 percent of the total of student dropouts registered. The general pattern can be seen in Table 3.12.

TABLE 3.12

Cycle in which student dropped out by nationality

In percentages

PERIOD IN WHICH STUDENTS DROP OUT	NATIONALITY OF ORIGIN		TOTAL
	SPANISH	FOREIGN	
ESO I C and SGP	12.9	27.9	**14.4**
ESO II C	26.0	48.8	**28.3**
Bacc. and Int.VT	61.2	23.3	**57.3**

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

Among students that drop out, foreign born students tend to do so earlier, double the proportion of Spanish students that drop out of ESO; 77 percent of foreign students that drop out doing so before completing compulsory secondary education, only 23 percent dropping out after completing ESO in comparison to 61 percent for Spanish students.

By region of origin, only those that come from Western Europe or the United States follow similar patterns to those of Spanish students: two thirds of those that drop out do so in post compulsory levels. The Chinese also seem to follow this pattern, but their numbers are low. The rest are situated below this average of 23 percent. Latin Americans, Africans and East Europeans have a major impact on the overall percentages as they make up the majority of foreign students that drop out of the school system (91 percent).

3.4. Disrupted families

The stability of the family of origin of the student is a fourth factor whose impact on dropout rates is known. However, in this case the relationship between family stability and failure at school is not well understood or integrated into the analysis of the overall educational process leading to dropping out of school. The only reasonable assumption that we can make is that the response of school-age children and adolescents to changes in the family model tend to be negative. Of course this is not a question of judging the value of different types of family models, but single-parent families are often the result of painful processes that seem to have a negative impact on school performance. These processes are connected to at least four aspects of family life which it can be argued have an influence on school performance: 1) the absence of a parent, 2) the presence of parents that have lived through traumatic experiences, 3) economic impoverishment tied to the break up of the marital relation and 4) the presence of other sources of instability in family life. Table 3.13 shows the results of an examination of the risks of failure according to type of household as has been reconstructed in the PISA survey. *Mixed households* are those constituted by one parent and another adult – the other adult having responsibility for the student, as defined in the survey, other than a blood relative. In other words they are reconstituted households. We must insist that these results do not imply a direct causal relation between divorce and failure at school.

TABLE 3.13

Indicators of risk of failure by type of household

In percentages

	HOUSEHOLD TYPE			
	NUCLEAR	MIXED	SINGLE-PARENT	OTHERS
Have repeated	27.4	34.2	33.7	36.8
Do not aspire to post secondary education	13.9	17.2	16.1	19.5
Score below one standard deviation	17.6	19.4	23.5	34.9
High risk of failure	33.2	39.4	41.4	51.9

Source: PISA 2003 and author elaboration.

The data tell us that the risk of dropping out is higher for all students that come from non-nuclear families, although in all the types of households analyzed the differences between the four indicators are similar. The presence of new partners (mixed households) seems to increase scores on the PISA test in comparison to single-parent households, but is to be related to higher levels of repetition and lower educational aspirations, without any significant difference with regards to students that come from single parent households. This last group is systematically disadvantaged in all indicators in comparison to students that live in married households. However, when the households are of a different type, in other words, when they are either group homes or young people living with family members other than parents and step-parents, the risks of failure skyrocket, to the point that they affect no less than 52 percent of students in these households. Note that this category includes students that live in shelters, students that live with family members that are not their parents and students that live in complex households without their parents.

From the data gathered from the school records of students that dropped out of school we can also extract some information regarding family situation. We begin by looking at the type of family focusing on which parent the student lives with (both parents, only the mother or only the father) and the relationship at the time school was abandoned. In this case we only have information from one third of the school records as this information was not gathered by all the schools.

TABLE 3.14

Period in which student dropped out by type of family

In percentages

PERIOD IN WHICH STUDENTS DROP OUT	FAMILY TYPE		TOTAL
	BOTH PARENTS	SINGLE PARENT	
ESO I C and SGP	10.8	16.7*	**12.0**
ESO II C	35.6	44.4	**37.3**
Bacc. and VT	53.6	38.9	**50.7**

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008 (*n<10).

As can be seen in Table 3.14, of the total number of dropouts, almost 20 percent live with one parent, 17 percent with the mother and 3 percent with the father. The presence of single-parent families among students who fail at school is relatively frequent. Regarding the moment when students drop out, the children from single-parent families tend to leave school earlier. In fact, 61 percent of those that fail at school from single-parent families do not complete ESO, compared to 46 percent of those that live with both parents. The results seem to worsen when the single-parent responsible is the father, although there are few cases in this situation.

IV. The process of failure: steps toward failure and dropping out

To analyze the steps that were taken by students that leave school early we look at information from the student records of those students that left school before obtaining a post compulsory or compulsory educational diploma during the 2007-2008 academic year. This compilation of student records is not intended to reflect the complete universe of students who fail at school, but it does provide enough cases of each type to permit us to compare the behaviour of students prior to dropping out. One group of premature dropouts are excluded: those who successfully completed ESO but did not continue their education. In addition, in gathering this information from schools that teach ESO, we have left out vocational training schools (which only teach vocational training) and a good part of the Social Guarantee Programmes[1] (SGP) (that were still in existence in the year concerned) because they were not taught specifically in secondary schools, so those groups are under represented in our database of student records. Despite these limitations, this database permits us to look at aspects of the process prior to a student's dropping out which would otherwise be difficult to analyze. The sample is presented in detail in the Methodological Appendix. Table 4.1 shows the educational cycle in which students dropped out based on the student records we analyzed.

The first thing to emphasize is that dropouts in ESO make up less than half of the total (42 percent), while those that drop out during the baccalaureate are more numerous. The low number of dropouts during intermediate vocational training (Int.VT) also stands out, representing only 13 percent of the cases.

(1) Social guarantee programmes were aimed at students that dropped out of ESO (from 16 to 21 years of age) without completing the corresponding objectives of compulsory education to provide them with a basic vocational training that lasted one academic year (except for those programmes aimed at students with special educational needs).

This is because our database is schools that teach ESO and does not take into account schools that are exclusively for vocational training, leading to students in intermediate vocational training being underrepresented.

TABLE 4.1

Cycle in which student dropped out based on student records

Records

		NUMBER	VALID PERCENTAGE
Valid	ESO I C	114	13.3
	ESO II C	242	28.3
	Baccalaureate	379	44.3
	Intermediate Vocational Training	110	12.9
	Social Guarantee Programmes (SGP)	10	1.2
	Total	855	100
Lost		2	
Total		**857**	

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

The high number of dropouts during the baccalaureate is also due, as we see in table 4.2, to the inclusion of students that have resumed their studies with the aim of obtaining (unsuccessfully) a diploma through distance learning.

Even if we do not count students in distance learning programmes (they make up 46 percent of those that drop out of the baccalaureate), the figures are still striking: almost one of every three students that drop out following the normal educational process do so during the baccalaureate. The figures regarding dropouts during the first cycle of ESO also stand out, as they account for almost four of every ten students that drop out during ESO if we discount those that reincorporate through adult education and fail in this attempt.

The period or cycle in which the student drops out is a variable that has to be explained by its relationship to failure at school as a process over time, we will try in the following pages to clarify the steps followed in this process. To understand why students drop out before obtaining a post compulsory educational diploma or certificate, it is not enough to analyze external factors; as important is knowing what happens within the educational system with cases of school failure. Thus, we consider not only external factors but also

TABLE 4.2

Cycle in which student dropped out based on type of study

Records

CYCLE DURING WHICH STUDENT DROPPED OUT	TYPE OF STUDY			TOTAL
	FACE TO FACE	DISTANCE LEARNING	ADULT EDUCATION	
ESO I C	114	–	–	114
ESO II C	194	–	48	242
Baccalaureate	204	175	–	379
Int. VT	110	–	–	110
SGP	10	–	–	10
Total	**632**	**175**	**48**	**855**

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

the students as individuals who make decisions and are subject to determined situations or internal dynamics in the schools. The advantage of focusing on internal dynamics is that it is easier to intervene and impact on these dynamics. In this sense we will look at issues such as repeating an academic year, grades by school subject, so-called diversification measures, disciplinary problems and absenteeism in relation to the process of leaving school early.

4.1. Age and repeating

We can use the ETEFIL [Survey on the Transition from Education/Training to Labour Market Insertion] to look at information about the age when students drop out. One of the ETEFIL samples is formed of cases of students that dropped out of ESO before completing the cycle. The definition of this sample refers to students that left the system during the 2000/2001 school year without having completed compulsory secondary education. It is, therefore, a heterogeneous group of different ages.

Those who drop out of the educational system before finishing ESO do so in much greater proportion during the second cycle. Only 8.7 percent of those who drop out do so during the second year or before (first cycle); those who do so in the first year making up a very small part of the total. It is in the third year, with 35.6 percent and above all in the fourth year, with 55.7 percent when the

majority leaves ESO. However, around 14.8 percent of dropouts do so before reaching the legal age of 16 (the age at which one is no longer required to be in school), and of these, 2.9 percent do so in the first cycle.

The age when students drop out of school is associated with other factors, such as gender, the educational level of the parents or whether the school is public or private. Regarding gender, girls seem to persevere more than boys. The proportion of boys that drop out without completing ESO before reaching legal age is five points higher than among girls, while a higher percentage of girls drop out that are 17 years of age or older. Among boys, only one third of those that do not finish ESO remain in the school system after reaching legal age, while this proportion is 42.6 percent among girls who drop out later and at higher levels.

The drop out age is also tied to social origin, concretely to the educational level of the parents (table 4.3). Among students whose parents only completed compulsory education or lower, the dropout age tends to be earlier: only around 35 percent of them wait until reaching 16 years of age in comparison to 48 percent of children of parents with higher levels or education or vocational training. The difference is found between the levels of primary and secondary education: around 10 percentage points.

TABLE 4.3

Age when dropping out by sex, parents' educational level and whether public or private school

In percentages

		DROPOUT AGE		
		BEFORE LEGAL AGE	AT 16	OVER 16
Sex	Boy	16.4	12.9	70.7
	Girl	11.7	12.3	76.0
Highest level of study reached by parents	Without education	16.3	15.6	68.1
	Compulsory	15.4	13.0	71.7
	Baccalaureate	10.7	13.0	76.3
	Vocational	10.7	6.7	82.6
	University	9.2	8.4	82.4
Public or private	Public	14.1	12.1	73.8
	Private	18.0	15.5	66.5

Source: ETEFIL 2005.

This difference, however, is not found in the division between public and private schools, as would be expected from their social composition. The proportion of students who leave school early is higher in public schools, but tends to appear later. It is striking that students who leave school before reaching 16 years of age make up 18 percent of the students that drop out in private schools in comparison to 14 percent in public schools. And the proportion of those who drop out who are over 16 years of age is seven points higher in public schools. This suggests that public schools are more tolerant of absenteeism and in this way delay student's leaving school, while private schools tend to force said students to leave even before they have reached legal age.

If we look at data from another sample from the ETEFIL, of students who completed compulsory education in 2000/2001, the age in which ESO is completed has an important relation to subsequent educational results (table 4.4). This is not surprising given that it is a variable endogenous to the results. In other words, the very delays constitute a component of the results. We can assume they have a dual influence: on the one hand, poor results lead to repeating school years; on the other hand, the fact of being older can have an important influence on the decision to continue or drop out of school.(2) It should be understood, therefore, that this variable is an indicator of the age adequacy of the student for the academic year in which ESO is completed, and not in subsequent ones.

TABLE 4.4

Itinerary after ESO is completed, by age

In percentages

AGE UPON COMPLETING ESO	DROPPED OUT			CONTINUED		GRADUATED		TOTAL
	ONLY ESO	BACCALAUREATE	INT.VT	BACCALAUREATE	INT.VT	BACCALAUREATE	INT.VT	
Up to 16	22.9	47.5	18.4	68.5	44.8	87.9	44.1	**69.9**
Over 16	77.1	52.5	81.6	31.5	55.2	12.1	55.9	**30.1**

Source: ETEFIL 2005.

(2) The indicator is based on the date on which the student turns 16. If this date is before the month of September for the school year in which he/she finishes ESO, the student is included in the group «over 16 years of age». Those that turn 16 during the school year are defined as «up to 16 years of age». We are referring to the sample of those that have completed ESO, where the presence of students that do so before turning 16 is minimal, therefore the table only differentiates between these two categories.

Among those that drop out upon completing ESO, only 22.9 percent are at appropriate age, and there is an even lower proportion at this age among those that drop out after initiating a vocational training cycle. Those that are successful in vocational training, however, climb to 44.1 percent, a similar proportion to those that fail in the baccalaureate. We can see that among those that continue studying, the age adequacy rates at the end of ESO are very high in comparison with the rest of the groups, although it does not reach the 87.9 percent of those who begin and finish the baccalaureate. We can suggest an interpretation of this pattern assuming that the delay in post secondary studies is connected to repeating during it, while the repetition in earlier years has an influence that is prior to the results. The levels of failure are higher when the lack of appropriate age is earlier, while repeating a school year later has less consequence in terms of success. Said in another way: the earlier you fail, the worse are the consequences.

The month in which students drop out of secondary school permits us to examine differences in the ways in which individuals leave the system. 68.4 percent of those who drop out do so in June or in September. The remaining third drop out during the school year, with a somewhat higher probability of doing so as the year advances, so that we can not attribute dropping out simply to students reaching legal age.

The association between the time of year during which students drop out and social origin or the type of school (whether public or private) suggests that this is a symptom of the existence of differences in the ways in which students drop out school. Dropping out during the school year is, in fact, more likely in public schools, by a difference of almost 12 points (table 4.5).

To complete this information we should take a look at our database of student records from 2008. It is logical to think that students that have been repeating school years during their education would be more likely to end with school failure. The data from the records point to this, although the relation with the moment during the academic year when leaving school is not always what would be expected. To estimate the number of times a student repeated during his/her education (table 4.6), data that is not included as such in the records, we looked at the ideal age (that expected for the corresponding academic year) and the actual age of the student. Thus we can speak of presumed repeaters when their actual age is greater than the age that corresponds to their academic year.

TABLE 4.5

Moment during school year when students drop out by parents' educational level and whether public or private school

In percentages

		MOMENT OF DROPPING OUT	
		AT THE END OF ACADEMIC YEAR	DURING THE ACADEMIC YEAR
Highest level of study reached by parents	Without education	63.5	36.5
	Compulsory	69.7	30.3
	Baccalaureate	72.6	27.4
	Vocational	69.1	30.9
	University	64.1	35.9
Public or private	Public	65.4	34.6
	Private	76.7	23.3

Source: ETEFIL 2005.

TABLE 4.6

Number of academic years repeated by educational cycle in which students dropped out

In percentages

YEARS REPEATED	ESO I C	ESO II C	BACCALA-UREATE	INT. VT	SGP	TOTAL FACE TO FACE	ESO II ADULT ED.	DISTANCE BACCALAUREATE
None	11.4	8.2	23.8	0.9*	–	12.4	–	–
One	21.9	32.5	40.1	14.7	50*	30.1	–	1.7*
Two	59.6	53.6	29.7	27.5	37.5*	42.3	4.2*	13.1
Three	6.1*	5.7	4.5*	18.3	12.5*	7.7	14.6*	11.4
Four	0.9*	–	1.5*	12.8	–	2.9	16.7*	22.9
Five or more	–	–	0.5*	25.7	–	4.6	64.6	50.9
Total no. of students	*114*	*194*	*202*	*109*	*8*	*627*	*48*	*175*

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

As can be seen, almost all the students that left school early repeated an academic year: only one of every eight dropouts never repeated. Logically, in adult education and in the baccalaureate through distance learning the percentage of repeaters reaches 100 percent, as what we are comparing is theoretical age (the age a student should have during a specific school year if he/she had not repeated)

with actual age. Among those who dropped out during the baccalaureate, 24 percent did not repeat a school year, while in intermediate vocational training almost all repeated. It should also be emphasized that 11 percent of the records correspond to students that dropped out during the first cycle of ESO without having repeated a school year (all of them before turning 16). We can state that almost all those that end up dropping out repeated a school year. Another issue is if the fact of having repeated the last school year (table 4.7) precipitates the decision to drop out.

TABLE 4.7

Repeaters of their last academic year by cycle

In percentages

	CYCLE IN WHICH STUDENTS DROPPED OUT					TOTAL
	ESO I C	ESO II C	BACCALAUREATE	INT. VT	SGP	
Did not repeat	53.8	49.8	42.6	86.9	77.8*	**52.0**
Repeated	46.2	50.2	57.4	13.1	22.2*	**48.0**
Total no. of students	*104*	*231*	*359*	*99*	*9*	*802*

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

As can be seen, repeating ends up provoking dropping out in almost half the cases. We find more repeaters in the last school year among cases of those that dropped out during the baccalaureate, fewer repeaters among those in vocational training, and relatively few among those who leave school during ESO. In the post compulsory educational cycles we find different situations: during the baccalaureate the tendency is to repeat a year and after to drop out, while in the vocational training cycles we find few cases of students who try to pass a course a second time.

We have analyzed repeating based on a comparison between theoretical age and actual age, which reflects the number of school years repeated. But we must also look at the case of students that drop out before reaching legal age. We can analyze the drop out age for each educational cycle (table 4.8).

It should be emphasized that among those that fail at school, and excluding the model of distance learning, the group of those that drop out upon reaching legal age (or before) barely represents 24 percent. Three of every four cases

TABLE 4.8

Age at which students drop out by educational cycle

In percentages

	CYCLE DURING WHICH STUDENTS DROP OUT					
	ORDINARY FACE TO FACE SCHOOLING				DISTANCE LEARNING	ADULT EDUC.
	ESO I C AND SGP	ESO II C	BACC/ INT. VT	TOTAL	BACC.	ESO II C
< 16	37.7	4.1*	–	8.6	–	–
16	49.2	19.1	–	15.5	–	–
17	9.0	29.9	7.1	14.5	–	–
18	3.3*	42.8	25.4	26.5	1.7*	8.3*
19	0.8*	4.1*	36.7	19.6	4.0*	16.7*
20 - 21	–	–	21.2	10.5	32.0	33.3
22 or more	–	–	9.6	4.8	62.3	41.7
Total no. of students	*122*	*194*	*311*	*627*	*175*	*48*

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008 (* n<10).

of failure reveal an attempt, at least during one year, to continue studying; in other words, these are not students that want to or that can leave the educational system as soon as it is legally possible. Among those that drop out during the first cycle of ESO, 38 percent leave the educational system before reaching the legal age for dropping out; and 49 percent just reach the minimum age necessary. The cases that are above this age are unusual (of the sixteen cases we have in our database, eight correspond to students dropping out of social guarantee programmes). In the second cycle of ESO the proportion of dropouts 16 years of age or below declines a lot: students at these ages accounting for approximately 23 percent of those who drop out during this cycle. The great majority at these ages remain in the school system one or two years longer, trying to successfully complete compulsory secondary education. The impossibility to continue repeating means that the number of cases of students over 18 years of age are very few as they move into adult education programmes. In post compulsory secondary education the number of cases of students dropping out before the age of 18 are few, almost all of them appearing in baccalaureate programmes (because students in intermediate vocational training have repeated before). 32 percent remain

in the educational system only until they reach adult age (without considering distance learning). Thus, the majority try to receive a diploma or certificate continuing their schooling until they are 19 years of age (37 percent) and often one or two years beyond (31 percent). In other words, in both the second cycle of ESO and in post secondary schooling it is common to lengthen the number of years in the system in hopes of successfully completing a programme and getting a diploma or certificate, so that there are even many who drop out after having returned to the educational system through distance learning programmes. According to our student records, those that drop out upon reaching legal age (or before) do so in the first years of ESO.

One additional piece of data related to this in the educational path reflected in these cases is the change of school. As is logical, almost all students in distance learning or adult education programmes change schools (the exception is those that did their compulsory secondary education in schools that also provide the distance learning baccalaureate programme). Changes in school are almost universal among those registered in the last four years of post compulsory education, usually because the original school does not offer post compulsory education, or does not offer the baccalaureate option or the intermediate vocational training option that interests the students.

Of greater interest are the cases occurring in ESO, where 42 percent of the students changed schools (26 percent of those who dropped out in the first cycle, 54 percent in the second). What is most striking is that those who join a school where they end up dropping out during the period of normal duration (two years for the first cycle, four years for the second cycle) have changed schools in very high proportions. In fact, students in the last two years that drop out in the first cycle of ESO changed schools in 49 percent of the cases. But, referring exclusively to ESO, we will see the relation between changing Below and the moment of dropping out.

Changing schools seems to have a positive result in the sense that it delays the moment of dropping out (table 4.9). In fact, those who drop out during ESO and do not change schools end up dropping out in the first cycle in almost half of the cases, in contrast to only 20 percent among those who change schools dropping out during the first cycle. Changing schools is, thus, not an indicator of worse results among those who drop out, but rather of a certain interest in

continuing education (although in the cases that we analyzed the final results did not end up being positive).

TABLE 4.9

Cycle during which students drop out by change of school

Students of ESO

CYCLE DURING WHICH STUDENTS DROP OUT		CHANGE OF SCHOOL		TOTAL
		NO	YES	
ESO I C	%	47.3	20.0	35.5
ESO II C	%	52.7	80.0	64.5
Total	**n**	**169**	**130**	**299**

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

4.2. Academic results

The academic results of students that drop out in each of the cycles are different. This section takes a look at this difference, analyzing the grades obtained in the subjects studied among those who dropped out in each cycle. It should be clarified that the grades that we analyze are those that are in the student records, in other words, those that correspond to the last reported evaluation of the students, independent of the number of times they had been evaluated for each subject. In other words, if they had repeated the school year, the grades correspond to the year in which they repeated, not to the initial year they took the subject(s). Therefore, to provide more complete information on grades we will refer to the percentage of repeaters that we just analyzed. As a general note, it should be mentioned that we do not have evaluations available for each and every student, although we do know the moment when students dropped out, so the number of cases analyzed in each cycle is less than the number presented in table 4.2.

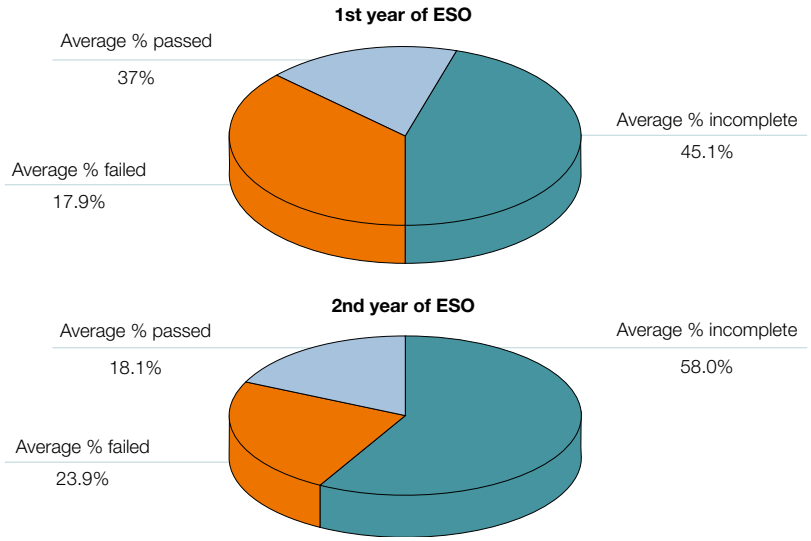
Dropouts during the first cycle of ESO and in social guarantee programmes

Those who dropped out during the first cycle of ESO make up 13.3 percent of the total number of dropouts, and 18 percent of the cases that followed the common educational modality.

Based on the information obtained, we can state that these students had academic results, reflected in their grades, which indicate a clear disconnection from normal educational practice. This is reflected in their basic strategy, as indicated in graph 4.1, of not taking the exams in classes which, because of their age, they are required to take. We can see that, on average, they do not take their exams in 45 percent of the classes they are enrolled in during the first year of ESO, and 58 percent in the second year (labelled as incomplete in the following graphs and tables).

GRAPH 4.1

Results for students that drop out during the first cycle of ESO



Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

We might conclude that a lack of interest in certain subjects or their perceived difficulty would provoke, on principle, that the weight of the cases of students that do not take exams would be higher for those subjects, an explanation which implies that it is certain subjects (more difficult or less interesting) and not the system which cause the students' loss of interest. However, the data show that this is not the case: there are no particular subjects that stand out as those which students do not complete; instead, all the classes are a part of the same dynamic.

In addition, this is accentuated when the moment to drop out appears decided, whatever the subjects may be that are offered, which explains the increased proportion of classes in which these students do not take exams in the second year. Not even subjects that are less theoretical, such as physical education or art, are outside of this dynamic; and in these classes the proportion of students that do not take the exams is over 55 percent during the second year of ESO among students that drop out during this year. In this sense, subjects that have an image as being more difficult or less attractive, such as mathematics or languages, do not stand out in a negative sense in the records of these students. For this reason we can say that the problem is not the content of the subject, but rather the disconnection between the students and the educational process in general.

Differences by sex seem to exist during the first year but they disappear in the second year, as can be seen in table 4.10. Girls receive failing grades less than boys and they take more exams in the first year, but in the second year girls who end up dropping out during that year end up taking the exams in fewer classes than boys.

TABLE 4.10

Dropouts in the first cycle of ESO. Academic results by sex

In percentages

SUBJECTS	1ST ESO			2ND ESO		
	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
Average subjects passed	29.0	45.4	**34.6**	17.1	17.9	**17.4**
Average subjects failed	23.8	19.5	**22.3**	34.6	27.9	**32.1**
Average subjects incomplete	47.2	35.1	**43.1**	48.3	54.2	**50.5**
Total no. of students	*70*	*36*	***106***	*39*	*23*	***62***

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

This academic behaviour in the first two years of ESO is specific to the group that drops out in the first cycle, greatly different from the rest of the students, with the exception of the few that drop out from social guarantee programmes (table 4.11) who have very similar academic results.

TABLE 4.11

Dropouts from Social Guarantee Programmes. Academic results

In percentages

SUBJECTS	STUDENTS THAT DROP OUT			
	1ST ESO	2ND ESO	3RD ESO	SGP
Average subjects passed	76.7	30.9	2.3	33.3
Average subjects failed	–	–	–	66.7
Average subjects incomplete	23.3	69.1	97.7	–
Total no. of students	*3*	*5*	*4*	*9*

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

The limited number of cases does not permit many conclusions to be drawn, but the strategy of not taking exams, primarily in the years of ESO, points to those that drop out from social guarantee programmes having a similar profile as those that drop out in the first cycle of ESO. Nor are differences between subjects established, not even among those of the social guarantee training modules. It is only necessary to observe that in the social guarantee programmes, thanks to the relationship students establish with the teachers, not taking exams disappears, although, given that the cases we are referring to are those of dropouts, the classes failed are a majority. Despite the fact that we have only gathered data from schools which impart ESO – and, in so doing, we have left out a good part of the social guarantee courses, which are carried out in other types of schools or centres (NGOs, vocational training schools, academies, chambers of commerce, etc.) -, we can state that the number of dropouts declines, above all because the most important academic problem of these students at risk of dropping out is avoided, which is not taking exams.

Dropping out during the second cycle of ESO

Taking a look at the profile from our student records of those who drop out during the second cycle of ESO permits us to analyze the academic evolution for a longer period of time – in many cases from the first year of ESO. The first thing to be emphasized is that these students do not have poor academic results in their first year; their results even being similar to those we see in the little data we have available on students that continue until the baccalaureate or vocational training. Their academic results are in clear contrast with those students that end up dropping out in the first cycle, who we just analyzed. In other words, those

who drop out in the second cycle cannot be easily identified by their academic results in the first year of ESO. However, as we have seen in section 4.1, they do not stand out in comparison with those that drop out in the first cycle regarding the repetition of academic years.

It must also be taken into account that it is precisely in these years where the diversification of the curriculum takes place (curriculum diversification programmes). That is, the possibility for certain students over 16 years of age to study under a different curriculum during the second cycle of ESO (the third and fourth years), so that the objectives of ESO and the corresponding diploma can be obtained following a methodology based on content (or areas) different from that generally established. This involves the creation of specific groups of students in these levels of ESO. By definition, curriculum diversification leaves out those who have already dropped out during the first cycle, in other words, some 32 percent of those that drop out of ESO, a percentage which reaches 37 percent if we also consider those that drop out in adult education. Through their academic results (table 4.12) we can evaluate the results of curriculum diversification from the perspective of the student (although in section 4.3 we will analyze the overall results of these programmes).

TABLE 4.12

Dropouts in the second cycle of ESO. Academic results

In percentages

SUBJECTS	WITHOUT DIVERSIFICATION				WITH DIVERSIFICATION	
	1ST ESO	2ND ESO	3RD ESO	4TH ESO	3RD ESO	4TH ESO
Average subjects passed	91.8	83.5	50.3	39.7	50.9	62.7
Average subjects failed	4.6	6.2	13.4	13.9	28.9	12.9
Average subjects incomplete	3.6	10.3	36.3	46.4	20.2	24.4
Total no. of students	*82*	*155*	*159*	*110*	*42*	*27*

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

As we pointed out, in the first cycle of ESO these cases did not seem to stand out academically, neither positively or negatively. It is in the third and fourth years of ESO when academic results are related to students' imminent exit from school. In these academic years we can differentiate the results of those

who follow the normal educational path from those who enter into a program of curricular diversification.

Those who follow the standard itinerary and drop out in the second cycle are more numerous and tend to repeat the pattern of academic results of those who dropped out in the first cycle: they do not take the exams in 36 percent to 46 percent of their classes on average. In other words, what appears in these student records is an increase in the subjects that students do not complete, while those that they fail remain at around 13 percent. Said in another manner: it seems that when the decision to drop out of school is near, the best predictor of this is the prior refusal to take exams rather than poor academic results. Another issue is to determine whether students not taking exams is based on a reasonable assessment by the students of their likelihood of passing, or if it is more of a self-fulfilling prophecy, but we do not have the data available to do more than raise the issue. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that those who do the second cycle of ESO in adult education programs are even less likely to take the exams and have even worse average results: they do not take exams in 54 percent of their subjects in the third year and 71 percent in the fourth, while in regular ESO programs these percentages are 33 and 39 percent respectively.

Among the subjects there are differences both in the percentage of students that take exams and in the percentage that fail. We see students failing to take exams in all subjects, but above all in those that involve greater difficulty. There are different and more negative results in these subjects (mathematics, English, physics and chemistry) and they probably have a decisive influence on the final decision to drop out.

We see clearly different results for those who follow an itinerary of curriculum diversification from those that follow the normal itinerary. The major difference is found in the percentage that does not take exams, which is limited to 20 percent in the third year and 24 percent in the fourth year. In other words, these programs are successful with regards to avoiding the disconnection from the educational itinerary, the value of which has to be recognized particularly if we take into account the profile of the students to whom they are aimed. The negative side is that the number of students that fail classes increases by a third, up to 29 percent. However, the overall results for those who participate in curriculum diversification, if we compare them with those who drop out during this cycle following the normal itinerary is clearly positive, despite the fact that in both cases students end

up dropping out without getting a diploma. The percentage of subjects passed is 51 percent in the third year and 63 percent in the fourth for those who are in diversification and drop out; while those who follow the normal itinerary pass 50 percent of their subjects in the third year and 40 percent in the fourth.

In any case, those who participate in curriculum diversification are a minority: 21 percent among the cases of those who dropped out during the second cycle of ESO. To complete this information, one would have to compare the relative success in getting a diploma (we only have data on those students that dropped out), but it seems that the students that fail in this group get better results in comparison to those who do not follow the diversified itinerary.

Results by subjects for those who are in diversification are quite different from those who follow the normal itinerary. Some easy or attractive subjects (music and art), tend to be abandoned in diversification, above all in the third year. And in the fourth year the abandoned subjects are the central ones, among which those in the sociolinguistic field stand out as something specific among students with this profile. Regarding other subjects, English and the scientific-technical areas – as also happens with the rest of the students that drop out in these years – are the subjects that are particularly difficult for the students in diversification. Regarding differences by sex, they do not appear in all academic years; rather they are concentrated in the years closest to when students leave school.

It is difficult to point out a clear tendency by sex (table 4.13). The differences seem to be affected by the type of itinerary. Girls take more of their exams in the normal itinerary and fewer in the diversified curriculum. Along the same lines, girls that drop out pass more subjects in the last year of the normal itinerary,

TABLE 4.13

Dropouts in the second cycle of ESO. Academic results by sex

In percentages

SUBJECTS	3RD ESO		4TH ESO		3RD DIVER		4TH DIVER	
	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS
Average subjects passed	50.5	50.1	35.9	45.1	52.1	49.8	67.9	57.8
Average subjects failed	10.8	16.5	16.8	9.7	28.7	29.0	18.3	7.9
Average subjects incomplete	38.7	33.4	47.3	45.2	19.2	21.2	13.8	34.3
Total no. of students	*86*	*73*	*65*	*45*	*21*	*21*	*13*	*14*

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008

and boys more in the diversified curriculum. Despite dropping out being the end result, it seems that curriculum diversification is more successful among boys (in the last year they do not take exams in14 percent of their subjects, in contrast to girls who do not take exams in 34 percent of their classes).

Dropping out during the baccalaureate

As we saw above, the largest group of dropouts is found in the baccalaureate. As proviously mentioned, vocational training cycles are under represented because of the way in which we have constructed our database (which does not include information from vocational training schools), this is significant and points to a basic problem: many students have been guided toward the baccalaureate, a diploma aimed at enabling further studies. Possibly these students would have had greater success (in obtaining a post compulsory educational diploma) if they had chosen intermediate vocational training. Analyzing these cases is particularly interesting as they reveal some of the characteristics of those who continue studying but do not successfully complete their studies.

Among those who fail to obtain the baccalaureate diploma there are differences based on the area of speciality (table 4.14). In some areas failure is more common, and we can see certain differences between students who are in traditional face to face learning programmes and those who are in distance learning.

TABLE 4.14

Dropouts in baccalaureate

By area and type of study. In percentages

TYPE OF STUDY	BACCALAUREATE AREA				NO. OF STUDENTS
	SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING	HEALTH SCIENCES	SOCIAL SCIENCES	HUMANITIES	
Face to face	8.9	20.2	52.4	18.5	168
Distance	15.6	40.8	29.9	13.6	147
Total	**12.1**	**29.8**	**41.9**	**16.2**	**315**

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

Overall, failure is concentrated in the social sciences and health sciences, although there are important differences according to the modality of study chosen. Among those that study in face to face learning programmes, more

than half of the failures happen in the social science specialty, while those who choose sciences and engineering make up only 9 percent of the students who drop out. The failures among those who do the baccalaureate through distance learning are distributed differently, health sciences being the option with the highest proportion of dropouts followed by social sciences.

To analyze the academic behaviour reflected in the student records, we distinguish between students in distance learning programs (46.2 percent of all the dropouts in this cycle) and the rest, and we deal with each modality separately. For each of these groups we analyze their academic results both before entering the baccalaureate and during the baccalaureate.

Of those that participate in a face to face baccalaureate program, 76.2 percent have repeated an academic year; among these students 36.1 percent have repeated two or more years and 39.7 percent repeated the last year. This group does have better academic results than their fellow students who drop out in other cycles (table 4.15), although there are many students that have repeated more than once. The database only includes current information on students' academic results, not the number of times they needed to pass a subject. The major difference between these students and those who drop out during ESO is that these baccalaureate students take virtually all of their exams, with the exception of the cases of those students that began vocational training and then returned to the baccalaureate (only to drop out in the end). The presence of students that come from curriculum diversification should be emphasized, being in greater proportion among those that drop out of the baccalaureate than in vocational training.

TABLE 4.15

Dropouts in face to face baccalaureate programmes. Earlier results

In percentages

SUBJECTS	STUDENTS THAT DROP OUT IN THE BACCALAUREATE						
	1ST ESO	2ND ESO	3RD ESO	4TH ESO	3RD DIVER	4TH DIVER	1ST INT. VT
Average subjects passed	96.0	97.6	99.4	87.9	58.5	97.1	66.7
Average subjects failed	–	1.2	0.6	9.6	41.5	2.9	–
Average subjects incomplete	4.0	1.2	–	2.5	–	–	33.3
Total no. of students	*9*	*80*	*82*	*80*	*11*	*10*	*3*

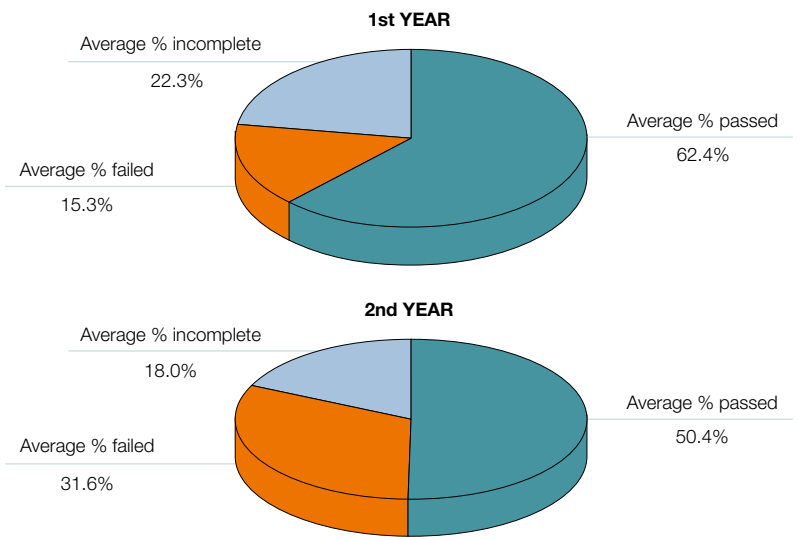
Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

By subjects we have to emphasize the practical absence of students that did not take exams or that failed subjects up until the fourth year of ESO among those that follow the normal itinerary. In contrast, in the fourth year of ESO the failures in subjects such as mathematics (31 percent), chemistry and physics (27 percent) and English (24 percent) are relatively numerous among students that will drop out in the baccalaureate.

Regarding the results obtained in the baccalaureate, the panorama changes considerably (graph 4.2). Results show that the strategy of not taking exams, although it increases, is not as frequent as we find among those that drop out during ESO. The problem seems to be in passing certain subjects as the number of failures grows to a proportion that we generally do not see among students that drop out earlier: failure in 32 percent of subjects.

GRAPH 4.2

Results for students that drop out during the baccalaureate



Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

We can analyze if there exist different results according to the specialty chosen (table 4.16). The majority of those who drop out from the face to face baccalaureate

are in the social science specialty (more than half), so that the overall results of all the students are similar to those of the students in this specialty. The specialty with the most differentiated results is science and engineering, where the percentage of classes in the second year in which students do not take their exams doubles the average (although there are very few cases), while in the health sciences there is an enormous increase in subjects failed between the first year and the second year: from 8 percent (the lowest) to 38 percent (the highest). In contrast, humanities is the only specialty in which those who drop out pass more subjects in the second year than in the first.

TABLE 4.16

Dropouts in face to face baccalaureate. Results by specialty

In percentages

SUBJECTS	SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING		HEALTH SCIENCES		SOCIAL SCIENCES		HUMANITIES		TOTAL	
	1ST YEAR	2ND YEAR	1ST YEAR	2ND YEAR	1ST YEAR	2ND YEAR	1ST YEAR	2ND YEAR	1ST YEAR	2ND YEAR
Average subjects passed	59.8	27.1	72.9	50.5	61.8	51.7	52.8	57.5	**62.2**	**50.7**
Average subjects failed	10.7	31.2	8.3	38.3	16.0	29.6	18.4	24.6	**14.5**	**30.8**
Average subjects incomplete	29.5	41.7	18.8	11.2	22.2	18.7	28.8	17.9	**23.3**	**18.5**
Total no. of students	*14*	*6*	*33*	*19*	*88*	*45*	*30*	*14*	***165***	***84***

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

Among the subjects not passed by those who drop out during the baccalaureate, the proportion resulting from not taking exams remains at an almost constant percentage in both years (something which differentiates the academic results of these students from those of students who drop out in other cycles). What distances these students from the profile of others are the percentages of failures. The reason for failure in the baccalaureate seems to be related to the difficulty of certain subjects for the students, above all in the scientific area, in addition to English. This is consistent with data already reflected in the records of these students, above all in the fourth year of ESO. In successfully completing ESO, students forget these difficulties and, in opting to do the baccalaureate, these students end up failing.

As was stated earlier, differences by sex in regards to dropping out tend to disappear in the baccalaureate. Beyond the fact of dropping out or not during this stage, we can look at whether the academic results of the students that fail are different in this stage (table 4.17). Girls that drop out have better results, passing a higher percentage of subjects in both years of the baccalaureate. This is due, not to fewer failed subjects, but to a higher proportion of subjects for which they take exams, above all in the second year. Along these lines, girls tend to disconnect less than boys, which, although they end up dropping out, leads to better results.

TABLE 4.17

Dropouts in face to face baccalaureate. Results by sex

In percentages

SUBJECTS	BOYS		GIRLS		TOTAL	
	1ST YEAR	2ND YEAR	1ST YEAR	2ND YEAR	1ST YEAR	2ND YEAR
Average subjects passed	56.0	48.7	67.4	52.3	**62.3**	**50.8**
Average subjects failed	18.5	24.6	12.9	35.7	**15.4**	**31.0**
Average subjects incomplete	25.5	26.7	19.7	12.0	**22.3**	**18.2**
Total no. of students	*81*	*39*	*98*	*53*	***179***	***92***

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

The other large group of students that drop out of the baccalaureate is formed by students that try to obtain their diplomas through distance learning. These are students that, having dropped out earlier, are trying again but fail in their attempt. We have very few cases with information regarding academic results prior to reincorporation into the baccalaureate through distance learning. In such cases we have an image of students that practically had no subjects in which they did not attend exams; their profile is not the same as that of students that drop out from the face to face baccalaureate, this can be seen by looking at their academic results in table 4.18. As would be expected in talking about distance learning, the great difference is in the proportion of subjects in which students do not take exams, which reaches an average of 50 percent in the second year of the baccalaureate. In contrast, the proportion of failures is much lower than in the case of face to face students. In other words, students in distance learning

programs take their exams in subjects they have prepared for or believe they can pass. In addition, it should be taken into account that distance learning works against synergies of support and the kindness of the teacher that students can receive in face to face education where there is a different kind of relationship with teachers.

TABLE 4.18

Dropouts in baccalaureate distance learning programmes. Academic results

In percentages

SUBJECTS	STUDENTS THAT DROP OUT IN THE BACCALAUREATE BY DISTANCE LEARNING	
	1ST YEAR	2ND YEAR
Average subjects passed	59.9	39.1
Average subjects failed	1.3	10.9
Average subjects incomplete	38.8	50.0
Total no. of students	*163*	*104*

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

The areas of study these students specialize in differ with respect to those of students in face to face schools, as we see greater failure in health sciences and sciences and engineering (table 4.19). We can analyze these academic results by specialty to see if there exists a differentiated pattern. The general pattern of not taking exams ends up not being such a pattern if we analyze academic results by specialty and year. The students that specialize in the areas of science and engineering and health sciences take exams in almost all of their subjects (even more than face to face students in these areas) and pass a very high proportion of their subjects in the first year. In contrast, those that choose social sciences and humanities have a very high proportion of subjects that they do not take exams for in the first year and they tend to drop out during the first year (hence, the decline in the number of cases with data, as there are practically only one fourth the number of cases in the second year among students with these specialties, while the number remains steady in the other two specialties). In other words, those that choose the science and engineering option or the health sciences option in the distance learning baccalaureate tend to pass their subjects in the first year and drop out in the second year. While those that choose social

sciences and humanities do not even take their final exams in three out of four cases in the first year.

The fact that the results in the common subjects of the baccalaureate are not particularly bad points to these students attempting to pass the common subjects, followed by those that are specific to their specialties, with which they end up failing and dropping out.

TABLE 4.19

Dropouts in baccalaureate distance learning programmes. Results by specialty

In percentages

SUBJECTS	SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING		HEALTH SCIENCES		SOCIAL SCIENCES		HUMANITIES		TOTAL	
	1ST YEAR	2ND YEAR	1ST YEAR	2ND YEAR	1ST YEAR	2ND YEAR	1ST YEAR	2ND YEAR	1ST YEAR	2ND YEAR
Average subjects passed	89.1	45.9	90.4	44.4	22.9	16.7	19.8	29.4	**60.2**	**40.4**
Average subjects failed	0.5	9.2	1.9	7.3	0.9	16.5	2.8	30.6	**1.5**	**10.1**
Average subjects incomplete	10.4	44.9	7.7	48.3	76.2	66.8	77.4	40	**38.3**	**49.5**
Total no. of students	*23*	*22*	*58*	*59*	*43*	*13*	*20*	*5*	***144***	***99***

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

In the baccalaureate by distance learning there are no differences in the results by sex. The proportion of subjects passed, failed and those in which students do not attend exams is identical in the second year, while in the first boys pass more subjects and the girls more frequently do not sit for their exams, but the differences are not important.

Dropping out during intermediate vocational training

As was mentioned in the beginning, these student records are under-represented in our database, as it does not include information from schools that only teach vocational training and do not impart ESO. Nevertheless, we can point out certain patterns in the process prior to dropping out. Practically all of these students repeated a year of school (99 percent), the majority before entering vocational training, as only 13 percent had repeated the previous year; regarding the second

year there are very few cases. The panorama is thus one of students that have repeated more often than others, although not in vocational training, and that represent a small percentage of the total number of cases in our database. The first thing to be said is that all the students in our database (except one) in vocational training dropped out in the first year; in other words, if the vocational training process continued with success one year more, obtaining a post compulsory educational certificate seemed almost guaranteed in intermediate vocational training, in contrast to what happens in the baccalaureate.

The academic profile is very similar to that of students that drop out from the face to face baccalaureate: they show up for practically all exams, and the proportion of failed subjects is very low except in the fourth year of ESO. We can see a greater proportion of failed subjects in the last year of ESO, although we are talking about very few cases. The low proportion of cases coming from curriculum diversification programmes and that fail in vocational training is striking; in addition, the previous academic results of these students are significantly better than those students who end up in the baccalaureate. In short, the academic profiles of the students from face to face baccalaureate programs and students in intermediate vocational training that drop out are very similar based on their results by subjects; although the students in vocational training have repeated more often: 58.6 percent have repeated two or more times in contrast to 36.1 percent among those doing the face to face baccalaureate. In these numbers the cases of students that dropped out at 21 years of age or more are not included, as they are considered to have reincorporated into intermediate vocational training after a break, not necessarily because of having repeated, and they make up 25.7 percent of the dropouts in intermediate vocational training.

If we look at dropping out in post compulsory stages, focusing on final results more than years repeated, it seems that we find ourselves before a guidance issue more than one of academic results. Those who end up in vocational training appear to fail less once they incorporate into post-compulsory studies. Regarding the results in intermediate vocational training, we have only gathered the cases for the first year, as we only have one case for the second year, a student who failed 75 percent of the subjects. These students fail 88.7 percent of their subjects and pass 11.3 percent. Dropping out happens for reasons related to the content of the subject; there are no cases of students not attending exams. This is the major difference between these cases and the rest of our students who

drop out, probably related to the content and the form in which the material is taught in vocational training. Given the very high overall percentage of subjects failed practically all the subjects are above 90 percent. There are no noteworthy differences by sex regarding the number of subjects failed.

4.3. Diversification measures

We will take a look at the process leading to dropping out among those students that have in some way been classified as "special". The first thing to be pointed out is that we are talking about students that follow the conventional educational modality: there are only three cases identified that have gone through curriculum diversification in distance learning and none in adult education. Schools have three tools available to classify these students and put into gear mechanisms that improve their chances for educational success: they are compensatory education (ANCE), significant curricular adaptations (ACS) and the consideration that some students present special educational needs (ACNEE); in addition, there is curriculum diversity, the results of which have been analyzed by subject; later we will return specifically to this.

Among students that drop out following the common modality, 6.4 percent of the cases have special educational needs; 11.6 percent require compensatory education and 13.3 percent significant curricular adaptations. In total, 24 percent of the students in the common modality that dropped out are in one of these three groups. In some cases students are classified in two or more of these groups, but that is not typical as can be seen in table 4.20. It should be pointed out that in many of the student records considered the data referring to the use of these tools does not appear. This is because this information is managed by the guidance department of the school and it is not always possible to have access to it, although we could consult the rest of the file. For this reason the number of cases is lower than the total number in the database.

The curriculum diversification program is also classified independently from these three tools. In total, only 15 percent of the cases in curriculum diversification are in any of the other categories.

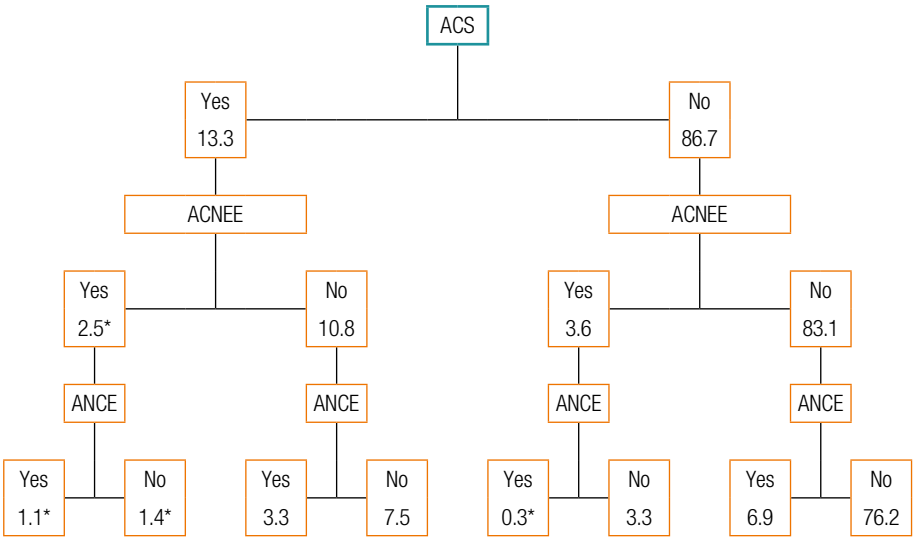
In our database we only collected information on students that had left school early, so we do not have data on students that successfully complete compulsory

education (and then leave without trying to continue), or on those, participating at some point under these measures, who obtain a post compulsory secondary educational diploma or certificate.

TABLE 4.20

Students with special educational needs: compensatory education and significant curricular adaptations

Percentage of the total



Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008 (* n<10).

Within these limitations, we can analyze the moment when students who were participants in each of these programmes or processes dropped out. We will begin with the most restrictive: students with special educational needs (table 4.21) and, therefore, with learning difficulties. These are students with greater difficulties than other students in following the common curriculum for their age (whether for physical, sensory, intellectual or emotional reasons, for difficulties and circumstances in their social and family environment, or because of a history of poor learning). To compensate for these difficulties, they need conditions that are specially adapted to their situation in the different elements of the ordinary

curriculum, as well as the provision of specific resources different from those the school offers to the majority of the students.

TABLE 4.21

Cycle in which students with special educational needs drop out

In percentages

CYCLE	IN ACNEE		TOTAL
	NO	YES	
ESO I C and SGP	28.9	60.9	**30.9**
ESO II C	47.2	30.4*	**46.1**
Baccalaureate/ Int. VT	23.9	8.7*	**22.9**
Total no. of students	*339*	*23*	***362***

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008 (* n<10).

Students with special educational needs that drop out (not counting those that complete compulsory secondary education and then drop out, or those that obtain a post compulsory educational diploma), do so during the compulsory stage in 91.3 percent of the cases. In addition, these students tend to leave school during the first cycle of ESO. Only 9 percent of students with special educational needs are identified as part of an ethnic minority, so this dynamic cannot be explained by the influence of ethnicity, at least not according to our database as the cases in which students belong to an ethnic minority are very few.

Compensatory education programmes provide reinforcement so that students with certain difficulties can reach the level of their classmates. Compensatory education tends to be organized through small support groups of students (a maximum of eight in a group) that meet outside of the normal classroom and during the school day (a maximum of eight hours per week); it is aimed at students that are behind in the curriculum and with learning difficulties, as well as at immigrant students with difficulties derived from their lack of knowledge of Spanish (in this case the number of hours per week can be increased in intensive language programs). Another form is support in the regular classroom for some students through the presence of support teachers. Essentially, it is a tool which both identifies the concrete needs of students with certain difficulties and employs other tools to meet those needs. It is interesting to see its relationship with the period in which these students drop out of school (table 4.22).

TABLE 4.22

Cycle in which students in compensatory education drop out

In percentages

CYCLE	IN ANCE		TOTAL
	NO	YES	
ESO I C and SGP	25.4	73.8	**31.0**
ESO II C	48.9	26.2	**46.3**
Baccalaureate/ Int. VT	25.7	–	**22.7**
Total no. of students	*319*	*42*	***361***

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

Despite being students with fewer difficulties than those with special educational needs, the results for those in compensatory education are worse in their distribution in the compulsory stage: almost three of every four drop out in the first cycle of ESO. Although the language difficulties of foreign students are part of the focus of compensatory education, such students make up only 33 percent of this group in our database, and among them 24 percent speak a mother tongue other than Spanish. In other words, although foreign students are an important part of this group, this by itself does not explain the negative dynamic regarding when students in compensatory education programmes drop out. It is striking that there are no dropout cases during post secondary education. This could indicate a clear success for these measures, in the sense that students that complete ESO and continue always obtain a post compulsory educational diploma. But it is likely that this data indicates (although we do not know based on our information) that there are few students (or there are not any) in compensatory education that continue studying in post compulsory stages.

Significant curricular adaptations refer not to providing occasional reinforcement for the student, but to a change in some of the content and subjects in comparison to the curriculum being followed by other students. This measure is used when other measures are not successful. It consists in a modification of the curriculum (objectives, content and criteria for evaluation) based on a case by case basis. Students following this program follow a parallel curriculum different from the rest of their classmates. Depending on the degree of deficit, curricular adaptation can take place in the regular classroom (with a support teacher) or in a support classroom. It needs to be approved by the educational inspection

service, and also requires the involvement of the school guidance department. It is, then, a tool which provokes a partial differentiation from the general pattern, in function of the needs of the students. We will analyse its results among the cases of student dropouts (table 4.23).

TABLE 4.23

Cycle in which students with significant curricular adaptations drop out

In percentages

CYCLE	WITH ACS		TOTAL
	NO	YES	
ESO I C and SGP	26.8	58.3	**31.0**
ESO II C	47.0	41.7	**46.3**
Baccalaureate/ Int. VT	26.2	–	**22.7**
Total no. of students	*313*	*48*	***361***

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

The results are somewhat better than those of compensatory education, as in at least two of every five cases the students made it to the second cycle of ESO. Again, the lack of data regarding students who complete ESO but drop out without trying to continue their education or regarding those that receive a post secondary education diploma impedes us from making a complete analysis of its effectiveness. The inexistence of students dropping out in the baccalaureate or intermediate vocational training leaves us with the question of whether there is complete success among those that try to continue or a massive renunciation of continued studying by those that enter into this program.

Both significant curricular adaptation and compensatory education appear to be good diagnostic tools (all the students included have problems and are potential cases of failure at school). With the limitations of the data, it seems that there is a notable absence of these students in post compulsory education. What we can state, comparing the two types of measures, is that the more intensive the measure and the more the curriculum is modified, the later students drop out in the compulsory stages.

Finally, although we already discussed curriculum diversification in the previous section, we will take a look at some of the data regarding this program here. Through this tool, designated students follow an academic curriculum with

certain subjects different from those that are a part of the common itinerary in the third and fourth year of ESO. For certain students over 16 years of age a different curriculum during the second cycle of ESO can be established so that the objectives of this stage and the corresponding diploma can be obtained through content (or even areas) different from that found in the general curriculum. It entails the creation of specific groups during the third and fourth year.

There are some cases of curriculum diversification among students that drop out from the distance learning baccalaureate, which is better than what we found with the last two tools we looked at. In table 4.24 we can see the situation among students that followed the face to face modality.

TABLE 4.24

Cycle in which students following curriculum diversification drop out

In percentages

CYCLE	DIVERSIFITCATION		TOTAL
	NO	YES	
ESO I C and SGP	24.4	–	**21.2**
ESO II C	40.3	71.7	**44.5**
Baccalaureate/ Int. VT	35.3	28.3	**34.3**
Total no. of students	*360*	*60*	***420***

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

Given its characteristics, in this programme all of the students made it to the second cycle of ESO. It should be mentioned that 28.3 percent of said students continue their education in post compulsory cycles (although they all fail in them) and almost a third make it to these cycles if we include distance learners in baccalaureate programs. Our data does not include students who successfully complete ESO, the baccalaureate and intermediate vocational training, but these cases indicate that this tool can be more successful than any of the other tools analyzed (the cases in which students continue their studies are frequent and, therefore, they have at least successfully completed ESO). In these cases, personal attention and diversification are effective (another issue is that not all of the tools used are).

What is striking is that the majority of these students, at least those that do not obtain a post-secondary diploma or certificate, choose to pursue the baccalaureate,

where 70 percent of those that fail in post compulsory education do so. What we see points to a guidance problem: the baccalaureate requires a long educational period to successfully obtain a professional qualification (minimum of four years), so that it is striking that these students with learning difficulties, that cannot follow the common itinerary to obtain their certificate of compulsory education end up failing in the majority by opting for the baccalaureate for their post compulsory education instead of doing intermediate vocational training.

4.4. Disciplinary problems

Discipline problems are often mentioned as being associated with failure at school. In this section we will offer some comments on this issue based on the information gathered in the student records we have been analyzing. This information is focused on the year the students dropped out, not permitting us to follow the disciplinary history of the students. Nevertheless, we can draw some conclusions. Schools gather data regarding the disciplinary problems of each student, with a gradation according to their severity: warnings or reprimands, minor offenses, serious misconduct and expulsions. We also include here specific correspondence sent to parents, almost always related to these types of problems, as well as the response to them. One last thing to mention regarding the information available is that this data only appears in cases of face to face education (not appearing in regards to adult education or distance learning as it makes no sense in either case), so that the data presented refer exclusively to students studying through this common modality.

28 percent of the cases reveal some type of disciplinary problem. This information is important: students with disciplinary problems make up a little bit more than one fourth of those who fail at school. In other words, the majority of students that drop out have not had disciplinary problems, so the initial idea or assumption that is often made is not accurate. Due to limitations in our database we cannot compare the disciplinary problems of those who drop out with those that continue their studies, but we can state that disciplinary problems do not affect 72 percent of the students that drop out. With the data in table 4.25, we can see if discipline problems are related to the period in which students drop out. In the table we present, along with the horizontal percentages which show us the distribution of students for whom disciplinary measures were taken in

each cycle, the vertical percentages which permit us to compare the period in which students drop out in function of the existence of absence of disciplinary measures.

TABLE 4.25

Cycle in which students drop out by whether disciplinary measures have been taken

In percentages

CYCLE	WITHIN CYCLES		TOTAL FOR ALL CYCLES	
	NO	YES	NO	YES
ESO I C and SGP	40.3	59.7	11.8	44.7
ESO II C	62.5	37.5	27.0	41.5
Baccalaureate/ Int. VT	91.9	8.1	61.3	13.8

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

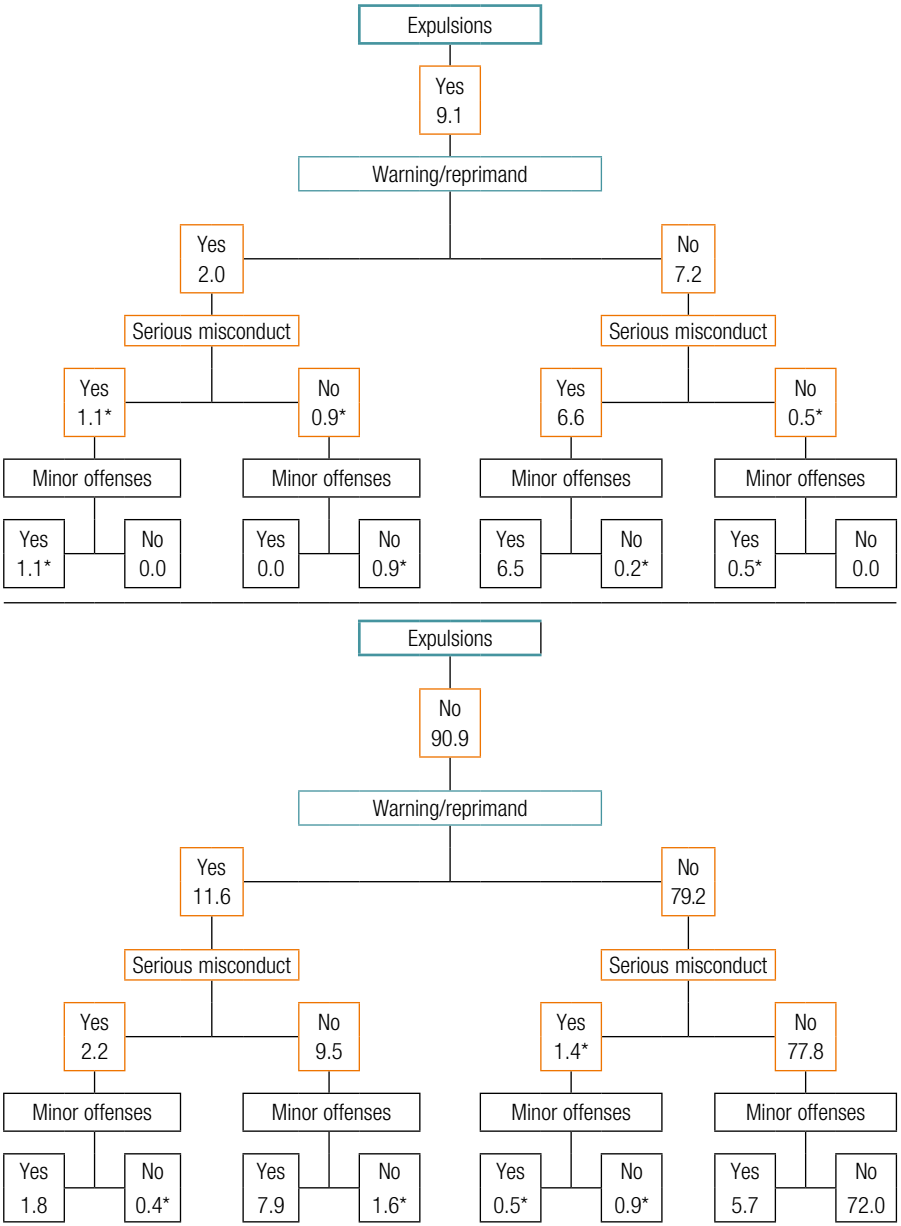
Disciplinary measures are taken frequently among students that drop out in the first cycle of ESO (around 60 percent), continue to be found with frequency among those that drop out in the second cycle (37 percent) and are much more seldom in the post-compulsory stage (8 percent). Students that face disciplinary problems make up 46 percent of those that do not finish ESO. If we look at the vertical percentages, 86 percent of students with disciplinary problems do not obtain the compulsory educational certificate, in contrast to 39 percent of the students without disciplinary problems. In other words, students with disciplinary problems tend to drop out before those that do not have such problems; although only in the first cycle do they make up a majority of the students that drop out.

Among the cases of student records in which disciplinary problems are registered, the most serious problems are the least frequent. Thus, students were expelled in 9 percent of the cases; reprimanded for serious misconduct in 12 percent; for minor offenses in 24 percent, and given warnings in 19 percent. Although the order of seriousness of the disciplinary problems suggests that those that had problems of a more serious nature must have also had other less serious problems, the data does not exactly reflect the expected, as there are cases of students expelled with out prior serious misconduct, minor offenses or warnings, although such cases are a minority. Expulsion is associated with serious misconduct and more frequently with minor offenses. In table 4.26 we see the distribution of the different types of disciplinary problems in a tree chart, with their percentages of the total.

TABLE 4.26

Expulsions by warnings and reprimands for minor offenses and serious misconduct

Percentages of the total



Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008 (* n<10).

The above means that we can analyze the relationship between each type of discipline problem and the period in which students drop out separately and independently. Thus, we can ascertain if there is a relationship between the seriousness of the problem and the period in which the student drops out. To simplify the analysis table 4.27 presents the data for the students broken down by the percentages for each disciplinary problem so that the sum of the cases do not coincide with the total.

TABLE 4.27

Cycle in which students drop out by type of disciplinary problem

In percentages

CYCLE	NO DISCIPLINARY MEASURES	REPRIMAND/ WARNING	MINOR OFFENSES	SERIOUS MISCONDUCT	EXPULSIONS	TOTAL
ESO I C and SGP	11.8	49.1	45.7	45.5	50.0	**21.0**
ESO II C	27.0	38.0	40.6	37.9	37.0	**31.0**
Baccalaureate/ Int. VT	61.3	13.0	13.8	16.7	13.0*	**48.0**
Total no. of students	*408*	*108*	*138*	*66*	*54*	***567***

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008 (* n<10).

What is most striking from the data is that it does not respond to the expected dynamic, as all the students that have been the object of a disciplinary measure have a very similar trajectory, the seriousness of the disciplinary problem not having great weight. All the groups show a drop out rate in compulsory education of around 85 percent, and we do not see worse results as the seriousness of the disciplinary problems increase, not even among students who drop out earlier, as the percentage is between 45 and 50 percent in all the groups. In short, there is no gradation in the academic results of students by discipline problems, rather, the relation is dichotomous: those that have some kind of discipline problem, however minor it may be, drop out with greater frequency during compulsory secondary education than the rest of the students who drop out of school.

Another piece of data available is the number of disciplinary problems which appear in each student record, so that we can see if those that drop out earlier had more disciplinary problems independent of their seriousness. In table 4.28 we can see the average number of problems for each type for those students that had disciplinary problems. Only in the case of warnings and reprimands does

the number of disciplinary problems appear to be linked with students that drop out earlier. Regarding the rest of the sanctions, in principle more serious, the average number of problems registered is almost constant.

TABLE 4.28

Average number of disciplinary problems per student by type of problem

Students with disciplinary problems

CYCLE IN WHICH STUDENTS DROP OUT	REPRIMAND/ WARNING	MINOR OFFENSES	SERIOUS MISCONDUCT	EXPULSIONS
ESO I C and SGP	6.74	2.10	1.93	2.67
ESO II C	3.02	3.02	1.92	2.25
Baccalaureate/ Int. VT	1.57	2.26	1.82	1.71*
Overall average	*4.66*	*2.49*	*1.91*	*2.34*

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008 (* n<10).

Discipline problems are usually attributed to the responsibility of the parents, and in principle are referred to in the notifications that schools sends to parents. 70 percent of the parents of students in face to face secondary education (including the baccalaureate and intermediate vocational training) receive specific notifications. This implies that it is not only the parents of students with problems that receive these notifications but that 93 percent of the parents of students in the first cycle of ESO and 83 percent of those in the second cycle have been asked to meetings in the school. Given these high percentages, we might assume that these are normal meetings that have been included in students' records. The figure climbs to 98 percent for both cycles for parents of students for whom disciplinary measures have been taken. In the baccalaureate only 44 percent of the parents receive notifications and 50 percent of parents whose children have had disciplinary problems. Therefore, although there exists a relationship and almost all parents whose children have had disciplinary problems are notified of this during ESO, there does not seem to be a large difference in the number of notifications between students that have had disciplinary problems and those that have not.

The response of the parents of these students – in other words, if they attend specific meetings proposed by the school about their children – is another way of measuring the involvement of parents with children with disciplinary problems. The data shows that these parents have a better response rate to the summons of

the school to meet than parents of children without disciplinary problems (table 4.29). If we take into account only parents that have received warnings regarding discipline problems from the school, the parents of children with problems assist meetings in 72 percent of the cases, in contrast to 50 percent for parents of children without disciplinary problems. If analyzed by cycle, the positive difference is maintained in all of them, although it is somewhat reduced in the second cycle of ESO as the proportion of parents of children without problems that attend the meetings increases to 71 percent (with problems, 74 percent). In the first cycle of ESO (adding students in Social Guarantee Programmes) and in post-compulsory education, the differences are over 15 points in favour of parents of children with disciplinary problems.

In short, of we focus on this indicator, disciplinary problems are not associated with less parent involvement in regards to communication with the school, in fact, the opposite is the case: these parents respond positively to the school more often than other parents.

TABLE 4.29

Percentage of parents that respond positively to meetings called by the school, by disciplinary problem and cycle in which student drops out

CYCLE	STUDENTS FOR WHOM DISCIPLINARY MEASURES WERE TAKEN		TOTAL
	NO	YES	
ESO I C and SGP	48.5	65.9	**58.4**
ESO II C	71.2	74.3	**72.4**
Baccalaureate/ Int. VT	29.6	100*	**36.7**

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008 (*n<10).

4.5. Absenteeism

It is common to consider absenteeism as a prelude to dropping out (Rué, 2003). We attempt to measure the relation between absenteeism and failure at school based on the data gathered from the schools. Again, to make a complete analysis we would need to know the frequency of absenteeism among those who do not drop out of school early, information which we do not have. Nevertheless, we can state that absenteeism is present with a very high frequency (above 90

percent) among those who drop out. We have information regarding the number of justified absences, unjustified absences and lateness, but only for the year in which students dropped out, so that we cannot provide an analysis of the evolution of absenteeism. We do not have data regarding adult education – and we do not consider distance learning –, so we focus on the students that follow the usual face to face modality.

Almost all of the student records examined record unjustified absences (91 percent of them); half of them record justified absences, and 22 percent of them record lateness. This paradoxical panorama, in which the most serious situation is the most frequently recorded is related to the nature of these records: not all schools record all of the data, rather they tend to limit themselves to recording the information that is considered most relevant, in other words, the most serious. Regarding unjustified absences, 10 percent of the records provide no information; regarding justified absences, 43 percent have no information, and 63 percent do not provide information regarding lateness, which forces us to focus our analysis on unjustified absences.

We could analyze the mere presence or absence of unjustified absences, but its high incidence leaves little margin for comparison. There tend to be more cases with unjustified absences in the second cycle of ESO (95 percent) than in the first cycle (85 percent), but we cannot deduce any tendency in this sense. However, we can analyze the average number of unjustified absences in each cycle among these students.

TABLE 4.30

Average number of unjustified absences from class by cycle in which students drop out

CYCLE	UNJUSTIFIED ABSENCES IN LAST ACADEMIC YEAR
ESO I C and SGP	225.92
ESO II C	124.94
Baccalaureate/ VT	136.27
Total	**148.46**

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

As can be seen in table 4.30, the average number of unjustified absences is very high among those that drop out of school. What particularly stands out is the average number of class hours lost in the first cycle of ESO (an average of 225.9 in the last year of the cycle among those that drop out during ESO I and Social Guarantee Programmes), which is consistent with the analysis we did (section 4.2) regarding the academic results of students who drop out at this early point in ESO. What remains is to resolve the issue of whether those who drop out early tend to have more unjustified absences, although the data does not point to this (table 4.31).

TABLE 4.31

Number of unjustified absences by cycle in which students drop out

In percentages

CYCLE	NUMBER OF UNJUSTIFIED ABSENCES					TOTAL
	NONE	1-50	51-100	101-200	MORE THAN 200	
ESO I C and SGP	34.7	13.0	7.6*	18.4	33.1	**19.4**
ESO II C	16.3*	37.0	32.8	41.9	23.1	**32.5**
Baccalaureate/ VT	49.0	50.0	59.7	39.7	43.8	**48.1**
Total no. of students	*49*	*138*	*119*	*136*	*121*	***563***

Source: Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008. (* n<10).

The panorama presented by the relation between absenteeism (measured by unjustified absences) and the period in which the student drops out is not clear. In analyzing early abandonment of school, we see that those that are absent from more than 200 classes drop out earlier than those with fewer absences, but those that are never absent from a class drop out at an even higher rate. If we look at the relation in post compulsory cycles, we see that there are fewer students with 100 or more unjustified absences from classes, but the difference with students who have no absences or those that have very few absences is not very significant. In short, based on the data we have and in contrast to what we would assume, greater absenteeism does not lead to earlier abandonment, although we must emphasize that we are always referring to cases of students that drop out of school.

4.6. Final comments on the process of school failure

From the elements we have analyzed we can draw some conclusions. Two almost universal elements appear among students that drop out: repeating an academic year (88 percent) and absenteeism as measured by unjustified absences (91 percent) among students studying through the common face to face modality.

Only 27 percent of those that drop out do so having just reached legal age or before, based on the data from the ETEFIL (24 percent in our database of student records). Based on our school records, students at these ages tend to drop out during the first cycle of ESO (38 percent before legal age and 49 percent at 16). In the second cycle only 23 percent drop out when turning 16. Those that change schools during ESO drop out less in the first cycle than those that do not change schools (20 percent compared to 47 percent respectively).

In the sample of student records analyzed discipline problems only seriously affect 28 percent of students that drop out. Said problems are concentrated among those that drop out during the first cycle of ESO (they make up 60 percent of this group) and almost disappear among those that drop out during the baccalaureate (8 percent). Among those that have disciplinary problems, 86 percent of them drop out without completing compulsory education. The seriousness of the disciplinary problems or sanctions is not important: all students with disciplinary problems regardless of seriousness (whether warnings or expulsions) have similar results regarding leaving school early. The parents of these students tend to respond more positively to the requirements of the schools than other parents (discipline does not seem to be a problem related to disconnection between families and the school, nor to parents that are not concerned about their children).

The diversification measures used are successful in diagnosis (they identify students with problems), but not as successful in treatment. In the case of measures regarding cases that are in principle less serious, such as compensatory education and significant curricular adaptation, they achieved the sad result that among the student records analyzed not even one student in said programmes continued in post compulsory education. In contrast, students with greater problems, with special educational needs, did so in 9 percent of the cases. The programme with the most success is curriculum diversification, with at least 28 percent continuing in post compulsory education, although the programme arrives too late for many students (being applied in the third year of ESO). The

problem is that the majority that later fail end up in the baccalaureate, which points to the aforementioned problems regarding guidance of these students.

We can establish profiles of academic behaviour in function of the period in which students drop out:

1. Those that drop out during the first cycle of ESO are disconnected from all their subjects, tend to not show up for exams and drop out when they reach legal age or, very often, before reaching 16. This is also the profile of those that drop out from social guarantee programmes.

2. Those that drop out in the second cycle of ESO get better results in the first cycle. We begin to see differences established in different subjects as these students do not take their exams in mathematics, English, physics and chemistry. Students in curriculum diversification fail more subjects and show up more frequently for exams, which lead to the academic results among students that drop out being higher for those that follow the common itinerary. Academic difficulties are also concentrated in subjects such as English and others in scientific-technical areas. The results of diversification are better among male students than female students.

3. Those who drop out during the baccalaureate are concentrated in the social science specialty (in face to face programmes) and the health sciences (in distance learning). Students in face to face programmes begin having failed a subject in ESO (10 percent). In this stage the number of students that do not take their exams declines, above all among female students, which means they get better results than do male students. In the distance learning baccalaureate there are greater differences in results based on specialty: the number of dropouts in the first year is high in the social sciences and humanities (students that do not show up for exams), while in the second year the worst results are concentrated in the other specialties.

4. Failures in intermediate vocational training are few, making up 22 percent of failures in post-secondary education (although with the limitations mentioned). All these students have repeated a year. In the first year dropping out is related to failing subjects (not to failure to take exams). These students' prior academic profile is similar to that of students that opt for the baccalaureate; choosing one or the other path again points to the issue of a guidance process which privileges the academic path of the baccalaureate as the most desirable.

V. The reasons for school failure

In this chapter we will analyze how students explain their decision to drop out of school, and the process that leads them to do so before obtaining a post compulsory educational diploma or certificate. This issue is addressed through the use of diverse complementary sources: we use information from certain questions from the ETEFIL, a series of in-depth interviews with young people that had recently dropped out and brief interviews with school principals (and in many cases guidance counsellors) from the schools where we obtained student records. The intent is to systematically present the perceptions of these different groups regarding school failure.

Among the issues we will address are the factors which push students out of the system and the factors from the outside environment which attract them. The desire for independence and autonomy, the comparative assessment made of the value of study versus work, and the academic aspirations of those that drop out prematurely are basic issues. The idea is to understand the way in which schooling is lived and experienced by the students, including the overall image that those who drop out have of the educational system. All of this without forgetting the causes that explain failure according to educators.

5.1. Going to work or going to school

One of the most interesting pieces of information that the ETEFIL permits us to analyze is the reason given by students for dropping out of school. The options that the ETEFIL survey offers can be divided into four major categories: students that drop out because of work (in other words, either because they have a job or because they have the intention of finding one), because of a change in studies, because of an explicit rejection of studying or because of the feeling that it is

impossible to complete their studies. In almost half of the cases of students dropping out before completing secondary education, rejection is the principal reason for dropping out, while in a third of the cases the cause is incorporation into the labour market.

Differences by sex are basically due to the relative importance given to joining the labour force as the reason for dropping out. Among boys, exactly one third state that they drop out because of a job or to look for one, and among girls this proportion is one fourth.

But when the differences are examined based on the educational level of the parents or whether the school is public or private, it is more difficult to draw conclusions (table 5.1). Change of studies is the reason least often given for dropping out by the children of parents that never completed their studies and rejection the most frequent. The other significant differences in the table are minor and difficult to interpret. These differences based on social origin also have an institutional context. The proportion that state that they drop out for change of studies is five points higher among students that studied in private schools. In the other more frequently mentioned categories, however, the differences are barely significant: a slightly higher proportion in public schools joins the labour market and there is no significant difference in the levels of rejection.

TABLE 5.1

Reasons for dropping out by sex, parents' educational level and whether in public or private school

In percentages

		REASON FOR DROPPING OUT			
		WORK	CHANGE OF STUDIES	REJECTION	IMPOSSIBILITY
Sex	Boys	33.1	13.6	46.6	6.6
	Girls	24.2	16.4	50.7	8.8
Maximum educational level of parents (recodified)	Without education	27.7	10.9	53.0	8.3
	Compulsory	31.1	15.2	46.7	7.0
	Baccalaureate	29.8	16.7	41.9	11.6
	Vocational	26.8	18.1	43.6	11.4
	University	28.2	17.6	45.8	8.4
Public or private school	Public	30.6	13.7	47.9	7.8
	Private	27.3	18.6	48.6	5.4

Font: ETEFIL 2005.

Differences in the reasons for dropping out by age are also minor, although reasons related to the impossibility of continuing to study increase with age, while those related to rejection decline.

In table 5.2 we can see both the reasons students give for choosing their course of study as well as the reasons given for dropping out among those that finish ESO. Three considerations have to be taken into account regarding this table. The first is that the number of categories comprised in the survey has been recodified into six groups in the first case and five in the second. The categories in the table explain themselves. Three of them refer to an instrumental conception of education: either to obtain a job after finishing school, to continue schooling at a higher level, or because the area of study chosen is easy.[1] Secondly, the issue regarding reasons for choosing certain studies and not others is not raised, as is logical, for those that drop out after finishing ESO. Third, some of the students that have completed vocational training or the baccalaureate give reasons for dropping out. In other words, they had dropped out earlier and than returned to school. Questions regarding dropping out and choice of studies apply only to the first time dropping out and the first choice of studies so that students that have dropped out or have begun studies more than once only responded the first time.

TABLE 5.2

Reasons for choosing course of study among students that finished ESO by their subsequent trajectory

In percentages

		FAIL		CONTINUE		GRADUATE	
		BACCALAUREATE	INT. VT	BACCALAUREATE	INT.VT	BACCALAUREATE	INT.VT
Reason for choosing their studies	«They like it»	48.4	59.9	53.5	51.0	55.9	58.9
	Instrumental: work	9.7	16.8	9.1	6.1*	6.1	16.3
	Instrumental: further studies	18.8	4.5	24.8	16.3	30.0	10.5
	Instrumental: ease	17.0	8.7	7.5	15.0	5.0	8.1
	Environmental influences	2.3	1.6*	1.2*	1.4*	1.0	2.2
	Indifference	3.9	8.4	3.9	10.2	2.1	4.0

Source: ETEFIL 2005 (* n<10).

(1) In contrast, the majority option is «they like it». The category «they like it» can be considered a type of non-response: it is very likely that it includes students that choose their studies for no clear reason, in addition to having a strong component of social desirability, and, therefore, care must be taken in interpreting this category.

The most important differences between the different groups are found among the options of an instrumental character. Clearly, choosing studies because of work is double among those that choose a vocational training in comparison to the baccalaureate, although it is not the option chosen by the majority of students. Those that state they choose their studies because «they like it» make up a much larger group. To continue studying to reach higher educational levels (such as university) is the reason most often given – after those who say they like studying – among those that opt for the baccalauareate, but is a minor reason among students in vocational training. Lastly, choosing studies because they are easy is more frequent among those with poorer academic results and those who do not manage to finish in both the baccalaureate and vocational training, although again this reason is given almost twice as often among those that finish vocational training. The same occurs when students choose their studies based on indifference. These options are connected to social origin and, therefore, there distribution in table 5.2 is explained by this.

The distribution of the reasons given for dropping out or the rationalization for it also changes based on subsequent trajectory (table 5.3). Obtaining a job is the principal reason given for a third of the students who drop out after beginning vocational training and a fourth for those that drop out after finishing compulsory secondary education. It should be emphasized that leaving school after completing vocational training, in regards to employment, shows a similar distribution to those who drop out without finishing their vocational training. This suggests that it is difficult to analyze the reasons for dropping out during vocational training, given that although a part of those who drop out do so because they fail at their studies, others drop out, according to diverse sources, because of the success of their choice, in the sense that students in the last years of vocational training find work without too much difficulty (in comparison to other groups and depending on their vocational training specialty). In fact, vocational training centres often have to negotiate with local businesses in the sector over retaining their students until they finish the training cycle. As a result, because of the difficulties in adapting the rhythm of the educational cycle to the needs of business some specialties in vocational training run the risk of disappearing.

TABLE 5.3

Reasons for dropping out at the moment and by type of study

In percentages

REASON FOR DROPPING OUT	SUBSEQUENT TRAJECTORY						
	DO NOT INITIATE POST COMPULSORY EDUC.	FAIL		CONTINUE		GRADUATE	
		BACCALAUREATE	VT	BACCALAUREATE	VT	BACCALAUREATE	VT
Obtained work	24.3	18.6	31.3	13.0*	8.9*	11.5	29.1
Reached educational level desired and/or looking for work	26.9	17.1	19.9	10.9*	16.1*	15.8	44.9
Change of studies	15.0	8.9	5.5	10.9*	10.7*	26.1	10.0
Rejection	23.3	25.0	21.5	15.2*	23.2	13.9	5.6
Impossibility	10.6	30.4	21.8	50.0	41.1	32.6	10.3

Source: ETEFIL 2005 (* n<10).

The differences between the rejection of studies and the impossibility of successfully completing them as reasons for not completing ESO should be noted. Rejection is a reliable indicator of resistance, as 23 percent of students that do not finish ESO and one fourth of those that drop out of the baccalaureate do so for these reasons. The proportion of those that finish the baccalaureate after dropping out is 14 percent – these are students that «recycle» –, while among those that finish vocational training cycles the percentage is 6 percent. Impossibility – in other words, for personal, family or economic reasons – is the reason given by 45 percent of those that reincorporate into the educational system after having dropped out, and by a third of students in the baccalaureate whether they finish their studies or not.

It is interesting to see that the reasons that male and female students drop out of school are different. Table 5.4 shows that getting a job – real or desired – is a more frequent motive for dropping out among boys than girls. This is particularly important among those that do not begin post-secondary educational studies and those that drop out in vocational training cycles. Rejection as a reason, however, is more frequent among girls that do not begin post secondary education or that finish with a baccalaureate diploma.

TABLE 5.4

Reasons for dropping out by educational trajectory and by sex

In percentages

REASON FOR DROPPING OUT		SUBSEQUENT TRAJECTORY						
		DO NOT INITIATE POST COMPULSORY EDUC.	FAIL		CONTINUE		GRADUATE	
			BACC.	VT	BACC.	VT	BACC.	VT
Obtained work	Boy	64.9	61.5	59.4	50.0*	60.0*	60.4	59.2
	Girl	35.1	38.5	40.6	50.0*	40.0*	39.6	40.8
Reached educational level desired or looking for work	Boy	68.3	59.1	73.8	80.0*	44.4*	54.5	53.5
	Girl	31.7	40.9	26.2	20.0*	55.6*	45.5	46.5
Change of studies	Boy	34.5	63.0	52.9	40.0*	33.3*	46.8	51.1
	Girl	65.5	37.0	47.1	60.0*	66.7*	53.2	48.9
Rejection	Boy	47.8	58.1	62.1	42.9*	53.8*	44.8	48.0
	Girl	52.2	41.9	37.9	57.1*	46.2*	55.2	52.0
Impossibility	Boy	41.5	41.4	64.2	43.5	65.2	40.4	50.5
	Girl	58.5	58.6	35.8	56.5	34.8*	59.6	49.5

Source: ETEFIL 2005 (* n<10).

5.2. The transition to adult life

Dropping out of school is seen as a transition to adult life. The project of adult life is marked by social roles connected to gender. Along these lines, in making the decision to drop out of school, one of the fundamental reasons alluded to in our interviews, consistent with what we have just seen, is to begin working life or look for work, or to take other steps toward an adult life (live with a partner with or without children). For almost all who leave school early, work symbolizes real life, what is important, while studying as preparation is less important:

–The important…, it's that what's important in life is work. That's what's important in this life!

(I3.6)

The importance of work is very present in the working class. Also among immigrants, many of whom only continue their education while waiting for their «papers» (I5.1), or because their potential employers make them, as they are underage and they need a certificate or diploma to be hired.

–Yes, in my job, they made me. I was still a minor at that time and they made me.
(I5.3)

And it begins to be a part of the discourse among Gypsies. They themselves consider this interest in work as an «advance», as something new. In the words of a young woman:

–Just because! It is an advance. It's that, because. You have to work. Just because! If not, what are you going to do in the future? Like you say: What are you going to do without work? You die of hunger working but ultimately you die of hunger, so. You have to work! That's obvious, to me always. You have to work! With my brother-in-law, who married my sister, he wasn't much for working. And my father said: «you have to work, you have to work, you have to work». And now, the reverse. Now he says to my father you have to work… For him, at first it was difficult.
(I4.9)

Despite this perceived importance, it should be pointed out that for many of the interviewees work is still just theoretical. In other words, although at the moment of dropping out of school they may say «I thought that I wanted to work» (I1.4), in reality they recognize that they did not seriously plan to search for a job. In some cases it seems there was a serious intent; as some interviewees recount occasional experiences looking for work but without success or persistence. For women, domestic responsibilities fill this space and they may state «I prefer to be at home» (I4.4), as will be analyzed in more detail below.

In any case, the idea shared by all about work at the moment of dropping out is that it is a way to stop wasting time. An education without success and the obligation to remain in school although one is not doing anything ends up provoking, at minimum, boredom. Faced with this, the idea of «going to work to do something useful» (I2.1) gains force as a way of escaping the tedium of school from which one has been disconnected for some time.

The other common idea is the association of work with money. Thanks to money «you can do what you want» (I1.4), this permits young people to escape the control of and dependency on parents. This means that, in dropping out of school, the idea is to have money to cover one's own expenses tied to

leisure and consumption. In general, what these young people are looking for is independence from their families and school and also in regards to consumption.

–I want to work, to earn my own money so I can party and buy things.
(I3.5)

For these students what seems interesting is outside of school, where you can do what you want and, in this sense, feel free; above all regarding time for night time leisure. Escaping parental control is very important during adolescence, when these decisions regarding schooling are made.

–And I said it: «Okay, now I'm going to live away from home and do what I want». For freedom, I went for it!
(I1.4)

Weekend night time leisure is what is real, what represents real life, in contrast to studies (which are mere preparation) and even in contrast to a routine job. Consuming alcohol and parties are life itself and, in fact, for many young people the closest thing to happiness, but for this you need money.

–I have never lacked what makes life okay, human. Okay, Sunday water, which is very good … Happy, happy…, you are never happy. But okay: as long as I'm not lacking money to go out and stuff!
(I5.3)

In the case of some immigrants, consumer objects embody the desire to be like everyone else. Young Spanish people enjoy certain things because their parents provide them. Young immigrants want to have the same things and, given their family situations, have to work to be able to buy them.

–Yes, yes! My idea was to finish my studies. But it all began; I don't know when you begin to want… these things. To have money for your own things, without having to ask your parents. The majority of…, let's say the Spanish, have this. The majority. In contrast, you, when you are here, you come to make your life. My parents, for example, here, it's different! You know? They can't give…, this…, the same that everyone else gets.
(I5.1)

In any case, «getting paid» (I3.5), the fact that «at the end of the month I'm getting paid» (I3.2), is almost always the first reason given when students state that they prefer working to studying. However, once young people have

worked for a time they realize that it is not enough to have money for one's small desires but that there are more important things.

–Me, up until I was 16 I was completely immature, and well, that's it, no one was on top of me and me: «Yeah I'm great» I'm working, I'm earning money», because I was here where I work. «I have my money, I give some to my mother but I have money, I have my motorbike, I have all my…». That is, I paid for my motorbike and I'm like a king. I said: «I'm happy.» But of course, time passes and you realize that having a motorbike is not the most important thing, having a video game console is the not the most important thing.
(I3.3)

Soon young people discover that the working world is not, in many cases, what they expected. Initial working experiences of those that drop out of school early are in some cases the ultimate reason for dropping out: they stop studying because they have been offered a job taking care of an old person (I5.11) or babysitting (I3.6) or, even because they have been offered a job that in the end does not exist; so that working can act as the definitive trigger for leaving school but it can be more of an excuse than a cause.

–I would have left! But that job offer was like an excuse to stop studying. And, nothing…, I would have left anyway…
(I5.1)

The sectors in which work is found are those which provide unskilled employment, in addition to those related to the care of children and the elderly already mentioned. Cleaning is another typical sector for girls. Restaurants (and bars) are also typical sectors for both sexes. Agriculture on family farms is an initial job for some boys (where they last only a few months).

The data from the Economically Active Population Survey on the employed between 16 and 19 years of age confirms this panorama. With the data on occupational sector (table 5.5) we see the concentration of teenagers in restaurant services, clerical support and sales, as well as in unskilled jobs. The distribution by sector of activity is also consistent with the panorama offered in the interviews, concentrated in restaurant services and sales, in addition to agriculture and other services.

TABLE 5.5

Concentration of teenagers in certain occupations and occupational branches in comparison with those of central working ages

In percentages

	FROM 16 TO 19 YEARS OF AGE	FROM 30 TO 49 YEARS OF AGE
5. Workers in restaurant services, clerical support and sales	32.9	15.7
9. Workers in unskilled jobs	24.5	14.0
A. Agriculture, cattle breeding, forestry and fishing	7.5	3.9
G. Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles	23.8	15.4
I. Accommodation	12.7	6.8
S. Other services	3.6	2.0

Source: EPA 2009. First quarter.

Working conditions as recounted by the interviewees are poor, not only because of low wages but also because of work schedules which affect personal relations or family life negatively; this is apart from instability: almost all state having gone through more than one job since having left school.

The means to finding a job tends to be, on many occasions, through contacts. Some, above all, middle class students, due to the power of their social networks, think that finding work is easy, as having no education or qualification is not an obstacle to finding a job or even «having a trade» (I2.1), except for those that want to take competitive exams for a position.

However, the lack of education is a problem for those from other social strata. Although they may have contacts, in formalizing the relation, even with distant family with whom they have occasionally worked, a diploma or certificate is a necessity. Social networks do not seem to provide the security that is offered to those of higher classes, even when the family is involved.

–As always I had a «connection» there, to work and earn money…. But, of course, once you have to be legally contracted you need a diploma and no one hired me… And now no one hires me and… You need it for everything!.... As always I was with my family, working and things like that, I thought it was going to be easy… but no!
(I3.1)

The army, which some of the interviewees aspire to join and is the current employer of others who declare themselves very satisfied, provides the exception to these working conditions. Thus, almost all the interviewees end up recognizing the need for education once they have dropped out and have seen what the labour market offers. It is almost a stereotype as they say such things as «I prefer studying to serving drinks» (I1.2), or what ever the job may be. Although they know that there are jobs for which no education or diploma is demanded, such as in restaurants, the general opinion is that «not having a diploma closes a lot of doors» (I3.3), as they «demand it even for sweeping the street» (I3.1). For this reason the majority regret not having taken the time and obtained a diploma.

Those that opted for social guarantee programmes as a training closer to the type of work they want to carry out find that, on the on hand, the preparation received is not enough to do the hoped for job well («the resources were not good enough to end up being really prepared» [I3.3]), and on the other, businesses do not value the certificate when hiring.

–I've gone to two hair salons with my certificates, but one told me «because I don't have much experience», but if it's to be an apprentice it's because you are going to learn! You don't need experience, I don't know…» And other times I don't know why.
(I4.2)

When those who never finished ESO look for work they well know that «even the ESO certificate is hardly anything» (I3.1). What they consider to really be useful is intermediate vocational training, which they say was barely talked about in high school. In short, it is not easy to find work «without a skill» (I3.5). In addition to the general need to be better educated, some speak of the need for a certificate or diploma for a concrete job, such as the baccalaureate to be a sergeant (I1.6) or ESO to be a police officer (I3.3).

Almost all of the interviewees are in agreement after having passed some time since they left school, about its value in the labour market, principally studies for higher degrees. Those that did not finish compulsory education say: «With studies you can work where you want to» (I4.2). Although those that have gone further and have completed ESO do not see it so clearly. In contrast, Gypsies consider education particularly necessary because their traditional way of life is heading toward extinction:

–Yes, I think that in the times we are in, the minimum is to go to school and learn to read and write. But I think we are in different times, this thing of marrying at thirteen or fourteen, you don't do that. And you have to have studies and things like that, no? Because we see how life is now, for us the Gypsies: the market, that's our's. That's going to end! So, it makes sense, at least in my opinion, to study, do something in life.
(I4.7)

In some cases, those that dropped out early also complain that what they are lacking is a diploma or certificate and not knowledge, and this fact keeps them from working because they are asked for credentials. The diploma may be missing «but I already know how to do it» (I5.3).

Despite this discourse valuing education, these are young people that dropped out of school, at least for now. One problem mentioned regarding returning to school is that once working life begins it is difficult to continue studying, given working conditions: the duration of the work day or changes in work shifts.

The project of the transition to adult life not only refers to the search for work. There are those that drop out of school to live with a partner or to have children. Among the young women interviewed this option was much more frequent than was expected. It is almost universal among Gypsies, very common in the rural world and is present among young urban women. For young men, it is only part of the discourse when they explain why they cannot stop working to return to school, as they have family responsibilities (I3.5).

For many women, family continues being the fundamental objective in life, even for those who leave school later. And they associate their personal realization more with the family than with work.

–I wanted, well what all the girls our age wanted: to find a nice boy! What I have now: a nice boy and to form a family. You make it to the end of the month okay or not, but you know that he's there.
(I3.6)

In many cases, having a partner and making the decision to live with him are what triggers dropping out of school, which is not reconsidered even if the relationship ends. The relationship seems to satisfy the aspirations for freedom of these teenagers.

–For this: I thought I was getting my freedom; in other words «now I'm going to have my house, do what I want, go out when I want, organize my life however I want». That was it.
(I1.4)

Also for girl Gypsy students having a partner, often getting married or, at least, engaged, is quite often the reason given for dropping out of school. The opinion of the partner is enough of a reason: «I spoke with my boyfriend and I left» (I4.4). It even happens in those rare cases in which students are in the third year of ESO: «I got married and left» (I4.6). No future is considered other than «safe, married and with children. And without doing anything» (I4.9). This domestic responsibility also includes taking care of younger siblings, a reason mentioned for dropping out of school even in primary school. In any case, they state that domestic responsibilities are much more attractive than making the effort to go to school.

–Straighten up the house and then…, well, watch TV or go out and walk around here. Better than being in high school!
(I4.4)

In short, for those who leave school prematurely, work seems more attractive than school, they consider it to be the real world, what is important. It permits them to get rid of that sense of wasting time that they have when they are in school, and also permits them to meet their own expenses for the first time. But the jobs they obtain do not satisfy them because of poor working conditions: low wages and long hours; so they come to recognize the importance of education for work, but it is then too late because responsibilities, work schedules and even the lack of habit and bad memories regarding school prevent them from returning to the classroom. It should also be emphasized that the family continues being the basic life option, also at the moment of dropping out of school, for many girls and young women.

5.3. The value of study and work

In the ETEFIL participants were asked to value the importance of five aspects of life on a scale from 1 to 5, and this innocent element in the survey permits us to make some important distinctions in the configuration of the attitudes of

young people (table 5.6). The general panorama is not surprising: the value placed on family is generally high, followed by leisure time, work, education and social participation. Consistent with the idea that personal maturation is earlier among girls, the girls give a higher score to family and education and the boy to leisure time. However, the differences by sex on these scores are only significant in the categories of leisure, family and education.[2]

TABLE 5.6

Value given to different life aspects by sex, age upon leaving ESO and parents' educational level

Young people that have completed ESO

		LEISURE TIME	SOCIAL PARTICIPATION	WORK	FAMILY	EDUCATION
Sex	Boys	2.18	1.40	2.01	2.66	1.75
	Girls	1.94	1.42	1.98	2.80	1.87
Age upon leaving ESO	Up to 16 years of age	2.03	1.41	1.92	2.72	1.91
	Over 16 years of age	2.11	1.40	2.16	2.75	1.58
Educational level of parents	Without education	2.01	1.37	2.17	2.82	1.62
	Compulsory education	2.06	1.39	2.10	2.79	1.66
	Baccalaureate	2.07	1.38	1.92	2.78	1.85
	VT	2.03	1.43	2.02	2.66	1.86
	University	2.11	1.43	1.84	2.67	1.96

Note: scores from 1 to 5.
Source: ETEFIL 2005. Elaborated by author.

If we focus on the age at which students finish ESO, we see a slightly different panorama. Here the differences between students that finish ESO and those that do not do so are significant in regards to the value given to work and education, and, with a confidence level of 94.4 percent, leisure time. However, these results are difficult to interpret and before doing so the weight of the educational level of the parents on the value of work and education has to

(2) The observable differences between boy and girls on the values placed on social participation and work are not significant to a 95 percent confidence level. It must also be taken into account that when they are significant, the differences are very slight.

be taken into account.[3] In short, older students (completing ESO with more delays) tend to favour work, and those whose studies have gone better tend to favour education. The differences by sex correspond, on the one hand, to the relative success of boys and girls in the educational system and, on the other, to a higher value given to family and lower value to work on the part of girls.

These results can be interpreted in different ways. First, based on the principle of limitation of cognitive dissonance, each individual evaluates reality based on their level of success in the educational system. Thus, in the distribution of the scores regarding work and studies, the performance of students in the classroom would appear as an effect on the value placed on studies. The second possible interpretation is that results in the educational system are a consequence of the personal value placed on study and work. In other words, students that value studies as something important tend to make a greater effort in class, while those that value work more highly make less effort or leave the system sooner. This relationship between the value of work and education and the effort dedicated to studies is tied to a third factor, that of social origin, which could come under the concept of class cultures, according to which, among the children of working class families the value of work is higher than that of education, while among children of the middle class the value of education is reinforced as an aspect of personal development, the construction of one's own biography and public responsibility.

Table 5.7 shows the average values for the five items among the young people surveyed for the ETEFIL.

Here again only the differences in the values given to work and education are significant to 95 percent. The values given to leisure time, social participation and the family are apparently similar among young people, except for differences by sex. Again the values given to work and education are related to level of success in the educational system. Regarding the value given to education, the highest scores are among those that finish the baccalaureate, followed by those that are still studying and then those that ended their education before the baccalaureate. In addition, the valuation of education is higher among students in academic programmes than in vocational training.

(3) Here also significant differences are established in the relative value of work and education, with differences of 0.26 points in the averages in the first case, and 0.30 points in the second, between the maximum and minimum values.

TABLE 5.7

Value given to different life aspects based on students' trajectories after ESO

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL REACHED	LEISURE TIME	SOCIAL PARTICIPATION	WORK	FAMILY	EDUCATION
Did not finish ESO	2.13	1.29	2.41	2.84	1.33
No post compulsory education	2.19	1.37	2.32	2.78	1.33
Failed Baccalaureate	2.08	1.37	2.27	2.79	1.49
Failed VT	2.17	1.34	2.38	2.85	1.27
Studying in Baccalaureate	2.02	1.46	1.99	2.69	1.84
Studying VT	2.01	1.43	2.21	2.67	1.68
Finished Baccalaureate	2.04	1.42	1.84	2.72	1.98
Finished VT	2.05	1.38	2.21	2.76	1.61
Total	**2.05**	**1.41**	**1.99**	**2.74**	**1.81**

Note: scores from 1 to 5.
Source: ETEFIL 2005.

We can see that there are no significant difference in the valuation of work among those that do not finish ESO and those that drop out upon completing ESO. In the valuation of work a similar but inverse pattern to education exists. Those most oriented toward work are precisely those that are going to enter or have already had contact with the labour market, while those that reach the baccalaureate in general tend to consider it as less important.

5.4. Aspirations and academic expectations

When looking back, in particular to primary school, many of the students that would end up dropping out of school early aspired to professions tied to university degrees. They wanted to be doctors (I1.4), psychologists (I1.6), journalists (I3.1), lawyers (I3.5), teachers (I4.9), computer programmers (I4.5), bankers (I4.3) and architects (I5.9). There were also those that were content from the start to just finish compulsory education. It should be mentioned that when we talk about these initial aspirations no one mentions vocational training, which only appears later, when they reformulate their expectations.

In general, virtually no academic aspirations are found among those that consider that education should end once a minimum of useful knowledge (such as knowing how to divide) has been acquired. For these students the criterion for valuing something is its concrete utility, for example, learning to fix a car so that you can fix your own car. And this type of knowledge to which they aspire to is acquired, according to them, outside of school, more in line with the classic idea of the apprentice that learns watching how others do it.

–Me, when my cousin…, with my father, when I have fixed some car or something, well I'm there and I learn! I take something out, I don't know, something there. I'm learning … and only for me, only for the family.
(I4.1)

The interviewees recognize the influence of their environment in general and the family in particular on their academic expectations. Although by the end of the interviews the parents appear in regards to defining their expectations, when they talk about influences they first mention their peer group, their friends. The key is the pressure not to stand out, not to be different from the rest of the group, so that personal expectations are adjusted to those held by the majority in each student's sphere of personal relations.

Regarding the Gypsies interviewed, the pressure is particularly strong in this sense, as studying is something «strange» (I4.5), and they say that they do not know anyone that has finished the first year of ESO (I4.4). The peer group makes them change their mind if they have an interest in studying. But they are not the only ones in this situation; immigrants also allude to relationships with friends as a negative influence on their academic expectations.

–I was a good student: I did all my homework, I studied, got good grades. No problems, and then, when I began with my friends…, okay, then I didn't care about school!
(I5.1)

But peer pressure does not appear only among those that did not finish compulsory education; those who are good students also face this pressure. There are cases in which students confess «it overwhelmed me to study» (I1.6) when they are the only members of their group of friends that are doing the baccalaureate. Finally, although the majority of the interviewed talk about

peer pressure in a negative sense, there are also cases of positive pressure in which friends push each other to continue studying.

–Why not!, because everyone has finished ESO and, I don't know. I saw my friends in high school, or those from before, with those from elementary school, and they've all finished ESO. And me: «I have to do it!»
(I3.2)

However, students recount in the interviews that they made the decision to drop out at 16 after having failed in high school or even in primary school. The argument is clear: if I didn't pass what was easy (primary school), why am I going to make the effort for what's much harder.

–I knew it: «I'm not going to finish ESO. I didn't even pass in primary school! I'm going to pass ESO?»
(I3.2)

The idea that the effort is too great and that it is not worth it to finish ESO increases as failed subjects and years repeated accumulate, at the same time as many get the idea that they have spent too much time in the educational system («I've spent a lot of time here, I don't want to go to school anymore» [I4.3]). In this sense, to drop out at 16 is almost considered inevitable («There was nothing else I could do» [I2.1]). Above all because making the effort is senseless if you do not obtain a diploma or certificate which seems such a distant possibility. And even more so when students believe that the compulsory certificate itself is useless without some additional years of study. The horizon is too far away.

–I left, I don't know, I didn't want to. You ask yourself: «why am I there if I'm not doing anything»…I don't know if you know what I mean: «Why am I there if I'm not going to do any kind of career training?».
(I4.5)

In other cases, when students clearly know what they want, resistance to following the common, more theoretical path emerges. There is an explicit desire to acquire a more practical education, identified with social guarantee programmes, which they cannot enter until they are 16. However once they begin the programme they realize that it is a «false start» (I3.3) and does not offer them the knowledge they expected. In fact, when they begin social

guarantee they are also doing ESO at the same time to complete their education: the change in academic expectations improves students' interest and results.

– I was in the second year of ESO, I repeated. It was like an enormous waste of time that second year in ESO because there was no reason for me to be there! I really wanted to leave so that I could go into social guarantee… It was, I don't know, boring! Very boring! Very boring! It was like, I don't know. It was awful, to be obligated to go there all those days. I couldn't do what I like: cooking, that was what I was interested in and…. Because I was doing six hours of social guarantee in the morning, yeah, and I went home at 3:30 or 2:30, and at 4:30 I had to go back to the same school to do the ESO!
(I3.3)

This adjustment in expectations is also related to the period in which students drop out. In the case of those that have completed ESO and have dropped out during the baccalaureate, the aspiration is not to do intermediate vocational training but to access the higher or advanced level of vocational training. This is also a more desirable choice for immigrants as it takes less time than doing a university degree. It is surprising, however, that after their experience working, those that have completed ESO do not aspire to do intermediate vocational training (which they can access) but advanced vocational training.

Much more common, whatever the period in which students drop out, is the fact of shifting academic expectations onto the following generation. This happens more frequently with women. Following the educational process and stimulating the academic aspirations, above all of their daughters, seems to be a way of achieving, although vicariously, their unattained aspirations.

–No, in the future…, I am clear that I am going to show her how to study. Sit with her, not like my parents that didn't sit with me. To study so she reads and all. Do everything possible so that she studies and can be a modern person… Sit with her. The best you can do if she's lazy is not to say: «go to your room!» Because a child in her room does everything but study. You go to her room with her, you sit there. Or, if you don't want to be with her, you look at her schoolwork before, and then you ask her questions.
(I3.6)

In short, academic expectations are perceived as a fundamental motivating factor. They are affected by the peer group (the student aiming not to stand

out either in a positive or negative manner) and by the family. But they are also dependent on the educational experience, above all on the impact of accumulated failures and years repeated. This is aggravated by the realization that compulsory education is not enough and it is necessary to continue studying. For this reason some students look for educational experiences outside of the school system (driver's license, music, other types of courses) or they shift their expectations onto the following generation.

5.5. The schooling experience

When students that drop out talk about their experience they focus with great detail on that which is related to how they experienced school; they talk about what happened to them in school as an explanation for their decision to drop out. To organize and address the information gathered about these experiences we have divided the information into three major thematic blocks. The first addresses schooling as a process and is focused on the importance attributed to periods of change and the difficulty of recovering when falling behind. The second block refers to students' relations with the educational community: teachers, classmates and family. And the third refers to personal situations that are mentioned as explanation for the decision to drop out: difficulties of adolescence, perceived intellectual difficulties, likes and dislikes, etc.

We begin with schooling as a *process*. The periods of changing stages, particularly when it involves changing schools, are critical. Most often mentioned is the transition from primary school to secondary school, from elementary school to high school. The general impression is that this process involves the greatest risk for students dropping out.

–And then comes the move to high school, well it is a bit more radical. And there, normally, it's where you fail, no? Either you are studious from the beginning and things go well, but a kid that doesn't work so hard, like I was, difficult… it's difficult to stay in school!
(I2.1)

The reasons mentioned by students in regards to the importance of the transition from primary to secondary school have to do with the change in the relationship between teachers and students. The relationship in primary

school is remembered as being much closer, with each student being followed individually. With the change to high school the number of students in class increases as well as the number of teachers for each group and per student, which in part explains the lack of individual monitoring. The experience of many of these students is that things were better for them when they were in smaller groups (either before or after this period). But the reason most often mentioned is that teachers in high school only pay attention to the best students; regarding the rest, the only thing teachers want is that they do not cause problems in class, reducing their monitoring of students to issues of attendance and discipline and forgetting about teaching.

–I think that primary school is better because in the high school, I don't know… There are a lot of people and not many teachers, or something. Because, for example, if you don't do well in high school and they forget about you. They discipline you but since they forget about you... In primary school, no. They pay more attention! A lot fewer children, a lot fewer people. But they pay more attention.
(I4.9)

A second reason alluded to by students that studied in public school in depressed neighbourhoods as well as those that come from small towns, is that the transition to high school meant an important increase in what was demanded and in difficulty. They unexpectedly went from understanding everything to understanding nothing. In primary school they could follow their classes without great difficulties, passing each year. They assumed the change to high school would be a continuation of this dynamic, but in a short time these students realized that it was not going to be like that. There was a change in the level that they were not prepared for, for which they would not receive enough support or supervision, and which many consider as the period in which they disconnected from the educational system – principally those that did not complete compulsory secondary education.

In this sense, those that have older siblings consider it a mistake to change schools when starting ESO. Their experience is that when the first cycle of ESO is taught in the same school as primary education (or in the old General Basic Education [EGB] of eight years), students go further in their studies. Therefore, they think that moving the change in schools forward was a serious error. In contrast, students that went to private schools in which there was no

change in school involved, did not notice any special difficulty at this moment in their educational path. For this reason one student stated that if he had gone to a private school from the start (and not beginning in secondary school as was the case), he would have gone further in his education.

–Well if I would have been at that school I went to, the private school, from the beginning, I'm sure I would have done as well as everyone else!
(I4.6)

There is one particular group for whom this passage from primary school to high school is especially dramatic: the Gypsies. For many of them this is where they escape from the educational system. In fact, in organizing the contacts for the interviews, few Gypsies entered into the initial design (which was modified for this reason) simply because they had never gone to secondary school. The only members of this group for whom this transition to secondary school was not traumatic were those that had been in private primary schools. So much so that the only Gypsies interviewed, both boys and girls, that had finished ESO or had made it to the second cycle of ESO had been in secondary school in private schools.

Although this transition from primary to secondary school is what is most commented on in the interviews, it is not the only aspect of the school experience that involved difficulties. For some students the transition from ESO to the baccalaureate triggered their decision to drop out. In such cases, the interviewee did not mention changes in the relationship between teachers and students, but the increase in the difficulty and the consequent increase in the number of subjects failed, consistent with the data from the student records we have analyzed.

The transition to social guarantee programmes is also not always perceived positively, the reason being that the academic level is so low that some students, above all those that make it to the second cycle of ESO, have the sensation that they are repeating content and they end up bored. But, in addition, the participants being students with difficulties, the rhythm of classes and, therefore, the content suffers.

–Yes, but the rhythm of the class changed a lot because, there was «the best from every house» we could say. The one that never studies, the one that never…, the one that had nothing to do and… I was there because I wanted to go. But there

were people there that would say to you: «And you, why are you here?» (well, because my mother made me come», or «there's no other classes open», and they were there because…, they sat there and, well, what I said before, to screw up the class! A lot of time they wouldn't let you learn everything that you could learn.
(I3.1)

In addition to the change in school and cycle, there was another problem related with the continuity of the educational process. Many of the students interviewed stated that when they went through an occasional disconnection, for whatever reason, with the regular rhythm of a class it was very difficult to recover from being behind. To the point that these set backs accumulate until provoking the student to drop out. Along these lines, work missed during relatively brief absences (15 days without going to class) or because of difficulties during a period for concrete problems, which at first the students assumed would be easy to make up, ended up being impossible to complete.

–In the first year, … when that happened to my mother I was like…. I began the second trimester and I said «Come on! I'm going to do well, I'm going to pass everything!». But there I was… I stayed there and, well, I couldn't. Neither up or down.
(I1.2)

The process in these cases is that an occasional disconnection from school ends up leading to subjects or even a whole school year being failed. The following year the content to be learned continues to grow: that corresponding to the specific year and that which remains to be learned from the past year. This situation discourages students, as it is not a question of making a little more effort, but rather an enormous effort must be made to successfully pass all subjects (and obtain that diploma). And this effort is needed from students that are characterized by their lack of interest and effort in studying.

–No, the last year, okay, the last two years I tried to do something, but with so many things I had to make up….You know? I was in class and they tell you that you can't pass the exams, because you have exams from before, from the second year… and then you go to the second year, you go to make up those exams from the second year and it's impossible! It was so much to study, and on top of it… I'm not used to it!
(I3.1)

Falling behind also means, in the case of repeating a school year, that you hear the same things again. What could be an advantage in passing the subjects still pending becomes a problem of boredom (very harmful during adolescence) and a motive for dropping out. To this must be added the difference in age in the case of students that end up repeating more than one year: «next to your classmates, you are the mother» (I1.4). Together, these factors provoke a sensation in students that they are incapable of completing their studies which pushes them toward dropping out.

–What was I going to do if I had to repeat all of them? All from the first trimester, plus those from the second, plus those from the third, uf! You tell me, what I never did I had to do in one week. Come on! I didn't do anything. I didn't even try.
(I1.4)

A final issue is the experience of the diversification processes. The remedial classes (compensatory) tended to be positively evaluated, though not always. For some, having to be there longer hours doing something that they did not like led to discouragement and the desire to drop out. More important was the composition of the students in these extra classes: having so many students with disciplinary problems made the classes useless for the other students, which could in part explain the complete lack of success of these measures in terms of the academic results of the participants, as analyzed earlier.

–And then, of course, we went to extra classes there, and you go there… whoever was interested the first year went, and then in the second, they see that you really want to finish ESO, so they keep you going there. But, of course, you had kids there… the boys, let me tell you, they were Gypsies, so they didn't have anything else and… they were there because they had to be. They didn't let you follow the normal rhythm of the class and I don't blame them, because after I was doing it also!
(I3.3)

The curriculum diversification programmes are also positively valued. The problem stems from those that, because they finally failed at school, could have taken advantage of this resource and did not. Some students that ended up dropping out without finishing ESO had, at the time, rejected entering these programmes because they had the idea that they were for «stupid kids» (I2.1),

and they preferred to try (and fail) in adult education, or directly drop out without finishing ESO rather than enter into a programme labelled in this way.

–No, it's that, anyway, I never wanted to do it. Because to me the diversification (it's not like that, but well…), I thought it was for idiots. Stupid kids. And to me: «Me? Go with stupid kids?» I said: «They are calling me stupid!».
(I3.1)

The students have a much lower opinion of the less formalized but perfectly recognizable processes of streaming students. A regular practice in the schools is to separate students beginning in the second year into good classes and bad classes, placing problem students in one classroom. This leads the students themselves to behave consistently with how they have been labelled, in other words, to be bad («because in this school where I was placed made us the bad ones, and then there was the best class» [I3.1]). Even more common is the custom of the teachers to separate students within the classroom, having the best students sit in the front, and those with the worst results in the back, in this way they receive less attention aside from disciplinary issues.

–Because we had one that taught social studies that those of us that didn't study… From the first day he had us in our places! He said: «You passed last year, you and you…, okay, up front. And the rest of you in the back». And those in the front he gave exercises, and those in the back we had a book, a notebook and we had to copy the whole book. Even the drawings and ridiculous things. And then, when we had the exam, zero, of course!
(I3.2)

A second major block of causes related to the schooling experience and its relation to school failure has to do with relations within the *educational community*. In general, students think that the atmosphere in the school is fundamental to their own success. This atmosphere is defined precisely by the relations that they establish with both students and teachers. This is one of the positive changes most commented on among those that continue their education in schools that are not a part of the system (in social guarantee programmes, for example). In fact, there are cases of this experience of a different atmosphere motivating students to return to formal education.

–The good feeling that was there with everyone…, because we were boys and girls. It was a good vibe, everyone was friends» Then the teachers….I say

«because I had such a good time last year, I'll do it», But I did it, I did it!... I passed the first year of ESO! Because I was there also last year… while I was doing cooking I was in the adult education school, getting the diploma.
(I3.2)

In addition, and seeing the importance students give to the atmosphere in the school they go to, we must also mention the relations that students that drop out have with the different members of the educational community. First, we will look at their relations with teachers. In general, these students have a positive image of their teachers, at least the majority, and they say they felt supported and were helped by them. When the relationship is closer, the results of these students improve. They recognize the effort that teacher have made, occasionally even after they dropped out, encouraging them to return to their studies.

–It was difficult! Because the teachers called me: «You have to come. Why don't you do it [register in the social guarantee programme]?» The secretary also called me often, the guidance counsellor also: «You have to do it, you have to do it!» I think because I was bored I did it. I said: «Okay, now that I'm bored: I'll do it and, if I pass, okay, and if not, okay…»
(I1.4)

But at the same time almost all the students insist on the importance that a bad teacher had on their trajectory, even if all the others were good. They mention cases of teachers that do not explain the material, that only follow a book, that tell students that they are doing it wrong but do not comment on or resolve concrete errors that they have made, that have a high rate of failures because they are «strange» (I1.6) and, above all, that do not complicate things by getting involved with the less brilliant students: they place them in the back of the class or look for another way to systematically ignore them. Students with disciplinary problems and absenteeism considered this the result of the attitude of certain teachers.

–Some were cool, sometimes, depends on the teacher. We had some that were cool and others terrible.
–Did they demand a lot?
–No, but they were rude. They only paid attention to those that studied. Those that didn't they ignored them and punished them.
(I3.2)

Some teachers, instead of solving problems, created them. The existence of bad teachers, in this sense, had serious consequences for the students and made the efforts of their own classmates useless. Teachers like to think that a good teacher is capable of «saving» students from failing (Pennac, 2008); but the reality that these students recount is the opposite: a few bad teachers wipe out the work of many good ones. The students themselves recognize the fatigue and loss of interest on the part of the good teachers for their situation. The system does not seem to reward them or recognize their efforts, in the same way that it does not reward those that are capable of understanding the ways of thinking and reasoning of the students.

–There were all kinds of teacher. There were teachers that helped you, that in some way they helped you with the work, that told you during the break that if you wanted to stay: «Well you stay and I…, go slow». And I, well yeah, you did it. But of course, there would be a moment when the teacher said: «And why do I have to lose all the break, the whole thing», I don't know, they got tired a bit also and…
(I3.3)

To be punished is not always seen as something negative; in fact it can be the opposite: expelling someone that does not want to be in class is more of a reward. For this reason students cause their own expulsion from class.

–Yes, the reverse, I think that is what you are looking for! See if they throw us out and, three days of vacation. If I don't think it is a punishment, three days without high school, well, what more could you wish for if you don't want to go to school! And on top of it they gave it to you, well, you don't go!
(I1.4)

Other consequences of discipline problems are not experienced with the same satisfaction by the students. In general, they consider it unfair that even if they have the knowledge they can fail a subject because of discipline problems, and they blame this on the professor of that subject. In any case, within this dynamic, disciplinary sanctions tend to reinforce the intention to drop out of school.

–It was very strange. Last year, I don't know, I was thinking… And as the teachers would throw me out of class… I said: «well, I'm here for no reason»! When I'm 16 I'm leaving». And I left.
(I1.2)

The last major block of issues related to how the students that drop out experience schooling might be referred to as the *personal situation* of those that drop out. This refers to, first, the moment in life when this decisions is made, which is adolescence. As one of the interviewed said when talking about her younger sister, who seemed to be following in her footsteps, «she thinks she's older than everyone» (I1.4). The problem is that in many cases leaving school early is a consequence of decisions that were made when the students were 12 or 13 years old, which is a time when «you don't think» (I1.4). At that time in life the normal thing is not to think about the future or the consequences of one's actions, but to think about the present, about everyday satisfactions.

–At that time I didn't think about the future. I thought about about the day to day. And it was: «I have a good time, I'm with my friends, I play soccer and I'm with the gang». I didn't think about the future.
(I3.1)

This leads to many adolescent students, believing that they are more mature than they are, being resistant to any criticisms or dissonant opinions regarding what they think and do in relation to school. The almost universal response when they talk about their academic results is: «I didn't care» (I4.4), or «It didn't matter to me» (I1.2)

Another line of argument related to the individual characteristics of the students, which is not incompatible with the previous point, is that some considered themselves incapable intellectually of reaching the level demanded. It is striking that in our interviews such statements are made only by girls: «I'm not made for studying» (I3.2), «I'm really bad with studies» (I1.4) or «I think I'm too stupid to do this» (I1.2).

In contrast to intellectual incapacity there are those who say they just dislike studying. In other words, «it's not that I can't, it's that I don't like to study». In the case of the Gypsies interviewed, this is associated with the idiosyncrasy of this minority.

–What happens is that I don't like to study. I don't like to study! And, man, you want something, it'll cost ya, as they say. I know I don't like to study… But we're like that.
(I4.3)

Other students insist that it is their dislike of studying and not inability that keeps them from continuing, such as in the case of those that try to do the baccalaureate and get discouraged with the first exam they fail, but to demonstrate that they have the ability they insist they have other interests that require learning and effort, such as music.

In short, the transition from primary school to high school is a period of particular risk, and is connected to a change in the student-teacher relationship: the teachers in high school only pay attention to those that do well; regarding the rest of the students, teachers are only concerned that they do not cause problems. In this sense, private schools are considered better, not only because of the attention given to the students but also because students do not have to change schools, something which is particularly beneficial for Gypsy students. The schooling experience shows that it is very difficult for students to make up ground once they have fallen behind because the effort necessary to make up the work missed or subjects failed is so great, leaving students discouraged and leading to increased risk of them dropping out.

The tools to provide special attention to students in need are positively valued; however, compensatory education is criticized because it concentrates students with discipline problems in the same classroom, creating obstacles for those who are interested in taking advantage of what the programme offers. In addition, curriculum diversification is considered to be something for «stupid kids», thus, some students even prefer not finishing ESO to being placed in this programme. What really bothers the students is the separation, not connected to resources, between good classes and bad classes and the separation within classrooms: those that pay attention in the front, those that do not do the work in the back. The response to these measures is that students adopt the labels placed on them, in other words, they end up acting like bad students.

The teachers are generally highly valued by those that fail. But a few bad teachers do a lot of damage, causing a greater desire in students to drop out: many say that their academic problems began with a bad teacher. The sanctions that are imposed for some are considered more of a reward than a punishment, but above all, they reinforce the intention to drop out. And all of this happens during adolescence, when these students believe they are «older than anyone»

and are impervious to criticism, opinions or suggestions because, «it doesn't matter to them».

5.6. School from the perspective of failure

To gather the ideas of those who have dropped out of the educational system before obtaining a post compulsory educational diploma or certificate regarding the system, the first thing to be mentioned is that the very concept of leaving school early, dropping out or failing is inverted from their perspective. They experience it as a personal achievement, above all because they left a situation, an environment in which they were not comfortable, either academically or personally. To drop out is to take a step forward, a positive step in their personal itinerary.

–Now I'm content. And now I am doing what I want! Before, in the high school, I lived with my mother and I had to go to class, I couldn't do anything. And now, since I work and I pay for everything, well, I do whatever I want!
(I1.6)

In this sense, the completion of compulsory education demands from them a very important sacrifice and effort, a sacrifice and effort for a certificate that is not useful in the labour market if it is not followed by further education during many more years. If they know that they are not going to continue their education, dropping out, even without any certificate or diploma seems rational: «If you aren't going to continue studying, why make the effort?» The image of a compulsory but useless presence in class is associated with a lack of freedom, to feeling locked in a routine. The final image they provide themselves: «School seems like a prison» (I4.1).

The school and the educational system, thus, have an image as something useless, at least to these students. «It's boring, I don't think it has done much for me» (I3.3). They are convinced that their experience in school consisted in their mere presence there without any sense («because sometime it seemed to me that I wasn't doing anything, you know, I was there just to be there» (I1.2)). Many of the students put it this way: «I learned a lot, but it didn't do anything for me» (I1.6); in other words, they acquired knowledge that they considered useless. For this reason a fairly common opinion is that «with primary school I

think it would be enough if you don't want to do a profession» (I3.2). In other words, they propose to reduce schooling, eliminating compulsory secondary school. Along these lines, some of them defend the idea that everything really necessary is learned outside of school.

The only thing these students considered useful from going through the educational system was to meet different people, «to make friends» (I1.6). In fact, some girls regret dropping out of school above all because it is a place where you have relationships with others (I4.9). Many students talk about what would be the ideal school. Their ideas fall along two lines. On the one hand, there are those that think that it should have a more practical and simpler orientation; which would necessitate teachers being more involved with their students, principally with those that show disinterest. On the other hand, there are those that imagine a school based on reinforcing traditional discipline; «like a teacher in the 1970s» (I3.3), and they firmly believe that repeating a year would be preferable to automatic promotion, being convinced that in their case, if they had been obligated to repeat in time, they would have had better final results (I3.1). In short, the students reproduce the typical pedagogical debate in the media. Regarding the educational itinerary the system imposes, the major criticism is that obligating a uniform education for all students until 16 years of age leads to students dropping out.

–The worst that you can do to someone is to make them be in high school until they are 16!
(I3.3)

In addition, the situation imposes, according to them, an excessive and irrational credentialism. To have a diploma that has value one has to continue studying long after finishing compulsory education. The very demand for diplomas or certificates is perceived as something new and excessive, in contrast to a classical model for learning, in which one entered into a business early and began to climb, which is what was experienced in many families and is considered as an ideal.

–Before people didn't have degrees and they had good jobs. My father never had a degree, and my father ended up being a programmer, chief programmer for a big company. And he began working when he was 14, imagine the education he had! And, today, they ask you for a degree even just to sweep the street! So these are things that have changed a lot in life. Why before no, and now yes?
(I3.6)

In short, what society considers a failure is considered a personal achievement by the majority of these students, dropping out of school permitting them to make decisions and to mature. They think that the uniform compulsory nature of school is useless and turns schools into prisons. They even think the knowledge acquired lacks usefulness, because the important things are learned outside of school. In this sense, they are critical of a credentialism that demands diplomas or degrees for everything and impedes other ways more directly linked to work. What they most value from school is the possibility of meeting other people, school as a place for relating with others and making friends.

5.7. Reasons for failure according to educators

In addition to the interviews with students that dropped out of school, we asked school principals and guidance counsellors from the schools where we gathered the student records we previously analyzed what they consider to be the cause of failure at school. These interviews were generally brief; in the majority of cases the director provided the answers and, in somewhat less than half the interviews, so did the guidance counsellor (see the Methodological Appendix for more details).

An initial analysis of the content of these interviews identifies all of the different causes attributed to school failure, trying to provide some order to the responses offered by these educators. There are four major groups of causes: those linked to the broader society in general (sociocultural causes), others linked to the family, a third group linked to the educational institution and, lastly, those that attribute failure to the student as an individual. In total, 21 different causes for school failure have been mentioned in the interviews. These are:

1. SOCIOCULTURAL CAUSES

1.1. Loss of the value of education. «Boasting about failures». The relationship between education, work and earnings is not understood.

1.2. Immediate gratification: neither effort nor deferred satisfaction is valued. They want money immediately. Early night time leisure. Regarding the future: «Someone will help me».

1.3. Neighbourhood or area (peripheral or marginal) in the city, or a depressed area (small towns) in a rural area. This includes those that come from specific primary schools. Also the idea of closed communities, which keep students from knowing about other options.

1.4. Being a Gypsy, particularly girls starting at 12 years of age.

1.5. Being an immigrant, poorly educated, with a low level of education for one's age at the moment of access, speaking another language or enrolling in the middle of the year.

2. FAMILY RELATED CAUSES

2.1. Parents' social class. Profession. Educational level. Employment situation (unemployed, marginalization).

2.2. Employment of the children in the family sphere (future) and as aid (current).

2.3. Expectation of the utility of education and culture. Family perception of the need for a diploma or certificate and the educational system as something imposed: there is no sanction if you fail in school.

2.4. Dysfunctional and problematic families.

2.5. Breakdown of the family of origin (divorce, reconstituted families, single parent families). End of the model of the traditional family (mother at home). Poor relationship with the children, absent father.

2.6. Relationship of the family to the school: lack of involvement or interest on the part of the family, lack of assistance at meetings.

3. INSTITUTIONAL CAUSES

3.1. Common compulsory curriculum, imposed and rigid which impedes diversification, very theoretical and inflexible. There is no alternative for those that reject it; they are «obligated» to come.

3.2. Low educational level in primary school, because of automatic promotion or because of characteristics of specific schools.

3.3. The system does not compensate for deficiencies related to sociocultural origin because it lacks resources (for example, social workers in the schools).

3.4. The transition from primary to secondary school means a change in the teacher-student relationship, less direct attention to students and a relaxation of control.

3.5. Teachers: there is no renewal in the way of teaching, they are not well-trained pedagogically. They do not know how to help students make up when they fall behind.

3.6. Other institutions with responsibilities (local governments, educational inspectors) do not take responsibility, or they are not effective in their responses to the situations raised by the schools; for example, they are concerned over absenteeism but they do not take any concrete actions.

3.7. Image of the concrete school: depending on the reputation it leads to a concentration of students with certain characteristics (good or bad).

4. CAUSES ATTRIBUTED TO THE INDIVIDUAL

4.1. Lack of natural intellectual ability.

4.2. Does not like to study, not interested in the content.

4.3. Gap between the knowledge of the student and that of the group generates boredom and lack of motivation.

The identification and codification of the causes attributed to failure by educators permit us to carry out a quantitative analysis. Once their answers have been codified, they are included as a variable in the student records database. In this way the weight of the answers from the schools can be considered in function of the number of student drop outs that they had. The results are presented in table 5.8.

The first thing that stands out is the number of answers that each school gives, an average of slightly more than 7.5. Therefore, the educators see failure as something complex which requires a multidimensional explanation.

The analysis of the answers by thematic blocks indicates that the most important social dimension in explaining failure is the area where students live, which is the only cause mentioned by more than 50 percent of the schools. It is noteworthy that the concrete situation is prioritized, rather than explanations of general social «degeneration» tied to a loss of values or the prestige of education. Gypsies and immigrants, by virtue of their very identity, are considered to be

in greater risk of failure, particularly Gypsies, which is consistent with analyses presented from other sources, although it may be politically uncomfortable.

Regarding issues related to the family, social class again appears as very important, but the most important factor is the utility that each family in concrete (and not in the abstract, in society in general) attributes to education. Along with this the relative lack of importance given to the relationship between families and the school or the possibility of obtaining a job in the family business without the need for education is noteworthy.

The causes linked to the educational system have two striking characteristics. First, they are the most numerous, probably because it is what educators know about with the most detail. Secondly, they are the factors upon which there is the least agreement. Only regarding criticisms of the rigidity of the compulsory curriculum do we find a large number of the educators in agreement (almost half). And only one of three complained of a lack of resources. It is also noteworthy that the interviewees in somewhat more than one fourth of the school were of the opinion that the teachers suffered deficiencies in their pedagogical training. In clear contrast to the discourse of the students, only a minority of the principals see the transition from primary to secondary school as an important factor in explaining school failure.

Nor do the characteristics of the students as a cause for dropping out generate major consensus. It is curious that it is a non-ascriptive characteristic, the gap between the level of the group and those that drop out, which is mentioned in the most responses. It should also be pointed out that reference to individual preferences is more frequent than reference to intellectual ability as a cause of failure.

Overall, three of the four causes that obtain agreement among more than 50 percent of the educators refer to family, and the fourth refers to neighbourhood. In other words, the family continues being the major cause of failure according to the educators. At the other extreme, the three causes that are not mentioned by even one fourth of the educators refer to the educational system. The exception to this pattern is the importance given to the rigidity of the single compulsory curriculum. To say it in another way, educators support the diversification of the curriculum as a means to reduce failure.

TABLE 5.8

Causes of failure according to school principals

Multiple responses. Percentages by school and by number of students that dropped out

	PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS (1 SCHOOL = 1 CASE)	PERCENTAGE BASED ON NUMBER OF STUDENT RECORDS (1 RECORD = 1 CASE)
1.1. Loss of the value of education	33.3	52.3
1.2. Immediate gratification	40.7	27.9
1.3. Neighbourhood/area (inc. small towns)	51.9	39.7
1.4. Being a Gypsy	37.0	32.4
1.5. Being an immigrant	33.3	17.3
2.1. Parents' social class	55.6	35.1
2.2. Family employment	29.6	12.6
2.3. Utility of education to family	66.7	82.2
2.4. Dysfunctional families	51.9	71.0
2.5. Breakdown of family of origin	44.4	28.3
2.6. Relationship of family to school	25.9	20.4
3.1. Rigid common compulsory curriculum	48.1	37.4
3.2. Low educational level of primary school	29.6	17.7
3.3. System does not make up for deficiencies. Lack of resources	33.3	57.3
3.4. Transition to secondary school. New teacher-student relation	14.8	17.1
3.5. Teachers with little pedagogical training	25.9	19.0
3.6. Other institutions with little concern (municipal gov't, inspection)	11.1	11.9
3.7. Image of the school leads to concentration of students	18.5	14.9
4.1. Lack of natural intellectual ability	29.6	19.7
4.2. Does not like to study	33.3	21.4
4.3. Student-group gap generates boredom, lack of motivation	40.7	26.8
Average number of answers	*7.56*	*6.63*

Source: Interviews with educators, 2009. Sample of student records of students that dropped out, 2008.

In analyzing the results of incorporating the responses of the educators to the database of students that dropped out, in such a way that the weight of opinion of each educator is equivalent to the number of students that dropped out prematurely from their school during the 2007/2008 school year, we obtain important information. It is noteworthy first, that the average number of responses declines: those who work more with students that drop out, attribute fewer causes to the phenomenon.

Family continues to occupy the position of honour among the causes pointed to by the educators. The most prominent change has to do with a cause attributed to the educational system. Now it is no longer the overall design (the common curriculum) which is the cause most agreed upon by the educators. The most important cause among them is that the educational system is not capable of compensating for difficulties of a sociocultural origin. In this sense they denounce a lack of means to make equality of opportunity real.

The loss of the social value of education and training also increases in importance if we take into account the experience of the educators with students that drop out, replacing in importance explanations linked to area or origin. Consistent with this, the social class of the parents loses importance as a cause of failure (falling 20 points).

Within the loss in significance of the majority of these explanations, the modification produced regarding the importance of belonging to a minority must be emphasized. While being a Gypsy, although less frequently mentioned as a cause for failure, gains in ordinal importance as it climbs one position, we must remember that we are talking about these percentages in function of the number of students that drop out of school early, thus, we have to stress that being an immigrant loses much importance: declining five positions and more than 15 percentage points in the answers given by the educators.

If we analyze the table from the perspective of the groups of causes, we see that those who speak from experience give greater importance to the educational system and society and less to the family (although the two causes that are most frequently mentioned continue being family related) than if we do not weight the data by the number of students that drop out in each school. It is also striking that a family element ends up among the least cited causes, along with those referring to the educational system, which continue being the least mentioned.

VI. Difficulties for the school in its old age

Despite the well known unease of the educational establishment and its discourse on the lack of social attention given to teaching, it is clear that the history of the educational system in recent decades could be summed up by the well-know expression: dying from success. After an initial elitist and specialized phase, and a second more fertile phase of universal expansion, the institution has entered its old age, in which every new advance in recruitment or each new development in its functioning resolves one problem but creates others in a spiral that seems to have no end. Part of this vicious circle results precisely from its success: in making the schooling age earlier, children enter school with problems of basic socialization and autonomy still not resolved; by prolonging compulsory education and postponing the option of leaving school, adolescents are subject to pressures difficult for them, their families and the institution to manage; by making education effectively universal, incorporating by degree or by force the most reluctant sectors, schools have opened up new internal fronts of rejection, resistance and rupture; by having substituted on the job training and conditioned access to vocational training to academic success, the school's validity as mechanism for producing a qualified workforce is being tested. After having won the battle over the church for the principal role in moral development outside of the family, the institution faces demands that go way beyond those of just teaching; after having finally convinced the society that school learning and diplomas are indispensable, it is confronted by expectations that it cannot meet which become sources of frustration and objects of conflict.

All of these changes have not been brought about by the institution alone, which, despite its capacity for expansion and its convictions, would find it difficult to impose them by itself. These changes have arrived along with the knowledge and information society. Such a change in epoch has brought with it, among

other things, two phenomena that are disrupting the traditional school and its objectives and raising questions about its validity in both instrumental and expressive terms.

Information and knowledge have undergone an unprecedented explosion, fundamentally in their application in production, increasing in a rapid and spectacular manner their economic value and converting them into scarce goods (strategic information and productive knowledge, not just any knowledge or information), with the consequence that access to them increasingly depends on the capacity of individuals to situate themselves advantageously in the economic and social hierarchy, and not to remain outside the mainstream.

Social stratification increasingly revolves around education. More over, this unleashes a credentialist spiral in which, at the same time that the value of education increases in general, that of the majority of specific degrees falls. This is a process comparable to that of monetary inflation, in which the monetary unit loses value while money is more and more necessary. The consequence is an escalation of claims that translate into political demands and expectations, which run the risk of translating into frustration. In the ordinary life of students this means that, on the one hand, they receive the constant message, which to a great extent they internalize, that they must study more and more, while, on the other hand, they also receive constant indications that perhaps the effort is not worth it because what is promised cannot be guaranteed. This contradiction is expressed at all levels of education, from the conviction of a non negligible sector of adolescents that education has no value to the undoubted impact, not to say social alarm, caused by talk of unemployed university graduates, the university as a factory of the unemployed or as leading to a future earning low salaries.

The discrediting of education has, without a doubt, an impact on the relationship of students with the school, although it must also be said that this, paradoxically, impacts more on the less informed, those that do not come from educated social and family environments, for whom school could be a lifesaver.

In addition, the information and knowledge society has meant a loss of the monopoly the educational institution has had over knowledge and information. In the process of the modernization of society, of which the school was both product and principal instrument, it extended the culture of the elite to the popular classes, representing in rural areas and in working class neighbourhoods

in the cities, a window onto the rest of the world, often the only one. Hence, it easily attained a clear influence over the family (the teacher instead of the father) and over the community (the teacher as a part of its lifeblood) and would often exercise such fascination over the most restless children of the popular classes that they would discover their vocation, deserting the plough and the workshop to become teachers. Today, the situation is exactly the opposite. In the middle of the profusion of opportunities in the city, the ubiquity of the media and the spread and development of the internet, the school has to do the impossible to maintain the interest of the students. The pioneer in pointing this out was Herbert Simon (1971): a world rich in information produces, as a consequence, a scarcity of that which information consumes, in other words, the *attention* of its recipients. In this new *attention economy* (Golhaber, 1997; Lanham, 2006), in which an avalanche of information and knowledge has to compete for the time and interest of the student, the school no longer benefits from any apparent superiority. The teacher *can win, but cannot convince*. This is not, as is often claimed, because the student is not capable of appreciating the value, the excellence and the advantages of school knowledge, but because these elements, if they are not accompanied by the capacity of the teacher to select the information and knowledge, to convince students of the accuracy of this selection and to organize effectively and efficiently their assimilation, simply do not exist. Not only may it be that they do not exist, but in the institutional context they tend to become invisible even when they do exist.

The teacher does not feel obligated to justify the relevance of what he or she teaches, as schooling is compulsory and the curriculum is predetermined and predesigned. The *cultural arbitrariness* of which Bourdieu and Passeron spoke about not long ago (1970), is not a secret that is revealed to the initiate at the end of the path, but an assumption, in part justified and in part no, but in any case difficult to fight, which permeates schooling from beginning to end; in other words, it is an institutional stigma.

In these circumstances, the institution is revealed to be, to a great extent, lacking in sense: it is neither attractive nor useful, nor does what it offers in exchange for acquiescence have value in itself or compensate. Combine this with the fact that students in general are forced to attend and the teachers are largely powerless (and we are not referring here to order and discipline, although that too) and we now have the principal coordinates of the situation in which we find the

knowledge institution of the knowledge society. Whether one wants to see it or not, one of the objectives of the successive reforms of the educational system has been to keep in the classroom, by law, many students who if not obliged to, would have left school earlier. Naturally, this has been done *for their own good*, but this does not guarantee that they also see it in that way. What is clear is that this institution, the last based on conscription, now faces a much larger public and, within it, a sector increasingly dissatisfied with being subject to the conditions of a forced adolescence, an intellectual activity that does not interest it, a discipline and treatment that it does not accept and a delay in its integration into the labour market and, in general to adult life.

Perhaps we have not thought enough about the fact that, in recent years, the senseless massacres, characterized as *running amok* (a murderous behaviour, indiscriminate, product of an explosion of seemingly unprovoked rage), have occurred with increasing frequency in secondary schools: since the most famous massacre of this type, in Columbine, there have been, up to today, seven in secondary schools, three in universities and only four outside of the educational system, although one of those was perpetrated by someone who had just dropped out of school.[1] Not as spectacular but perhaps no less dramatic, has been the proliferation of cases of bullying, abuse and violence among students, which in Spain are gathered together in the 2007 report of the Ombudsman. However, sensationalism must be avoided in this area (Fernández Enguita, 2007a).

Regarding teachers, they are not in the same position to introduce students into the knowledge society as they were in the industrial society. Then, the school was an essential and useful instrument in the construction of modernity, among other reasons, because its agents, the teachers, fully dominated the new knowledge support, literacy; their task being to teach this skill to the whole population. Teachers dominated this skill from calligraphy to literary expression, being great readers and, at times, the great writers of the period.

(1) Littleton (Columbine High School), Colorado, United States, 1999; Erfurt (Gutenberg), Germany, 2002; Carmen de Patagones (Islas Malvinas), Argentina, 2004; Kauhajoki (Seinajoki), Finland, 2008; Tuusula (Jokela), Finland, 2007; Emsdetten (Geschwister Scholl), Germany, 2007; Winnenden (Albertville), Germany, 2009; the German police stopped another attempt in Cologne in 2007. We could add other in post-secondary institutions or universities, such as at Dawson College in Westmount, Canada, Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia in the United States, 2007, or at Northern University of Illinois in DeKalb, Illinois, United States, 2008. At the same time four other massacres took place outside of schools: in a warehouse, committed by a 19 year old who had just dropped out of secondary school (Omaha, Nebraska, United States, 2007); in a parliamentary headquarters in Zug, Switzerland, 2001; at a teenage party although perpetrated by an adult (Crandon, Wisconsin, United States, 2007) and in a metro station in Tokyo in 2008.

Today the same cannot be said regarding their knowledge of information technologies and the internet, instruments that the majority of their students manage without problems and in many cases with great skill, while for many teachers these tools remain a mysterious black box. This army of teachers that led us with great success to the *Guttenberg galaxy* is not in the same conditions to lead us to the *Internet galaxy*. A sharpened and widespread awareness of this is present, surely, in the general profound negativity found among teachers regarding society, the culture and, above all, toward the media and the internet, which habitually represent them as a caricature to more easily dismiss them, and in the deep-seated lack of motivation of many teachers (Esteve, 1994; Fernández Enguita, 2009 a.b).

6.1. The worrying dimension of failure

The educational objectives of the European Union, set out in Lisbon, established the conditions for the development of the information society and the knowledge economy in Europe. These objectives are organized around the completion of a post compulsory educational stage, which in Spain corresponds to the baccalaureate or to intermediate vocational training; stages which should be reached by 85 percent of the students. How has Spain done regarding this goal? Spain is at 62 percent (see table 2.20), which represents the annual number of diplomas or certificates in these stages in relation to the number of persons at that age that could potentially have completed these stages. This means that Spain is 23 points below the objective that was set for 2010.

One necessary though not sufficient condition for the student population to obtain a post compulsory diploma or certificate is that students stay in school long enough to do so. But the data tells us that the percentage of the student population that stays in school until 18 years of age (which of course does not mean a student has reached the adequate level) barely reaches 70 percent, which places us up to 25 points behind other countries in the European Union (table 2.22).

This data refers to school or age cohorts, meaning that it does not capture the significant percentage of young people that return to the educational system after having dropped out, which, as we saw previously, amounts to up to one third. An indicator that does capture almost this entire group is the number of

diplomas or certificates awarded to young people from 18 to 24 years of age, referring in other words, to students that successfully finish though with up to six years of delay (greater delays are very improbable). Thus, we find ourselves with 31 percent of young people having neither a post compulsory diploma or certificate nor following an educational program aimed at providing them with one (graph 2.16), double the average for the European Union.

The fact is that this group of students does finish, but the question is how. 16.7 percent of the students in intermediate vocational training are repeating a course at any particular moment (table 2.19) and may have repeated or may repeat others in the future, and 48.9 percent are at least one year behind (table 2.18). Unfortunately, with the data available we cannot know how many of these possible future graduates are in this situation, or in what proportion will those that find themselves in this situation divide into those that successfully finish and those that do not. The situation in the baccalaureate is no better: barely 76.7 percent of students in the first year successfully pass to the second year, and only 73.2 percent successfully complete the second year and graduate (table 2.17).

Net school enrolment rates tell us something more regarding this issue, namely: that 87.6 percent of young people of 16 years of age are enrolled in educational programmes corresponding to their age, while at 17 years of age the percentage is 75.7 percent and barely 38 percent for those of 18 years of age (graph 2.8). Thus, 12.4 percent, 24.3 percent and 62 percent respectively of these young people are not in school. We could say that we meet the enrolment objectives of Lisbon for 18 year old students with those of 16, in other words, that students leave the system two years ahead of what is anticipated or desired.

Advancing further in our retrospective examination, we now find ourselves before those who drop out of the system after completing ESO. What happens during ESO? 28.4 percent of the students drop out without successfully finishing (table 2.11). The gross graduation rate, a similar but distinct and more realistic indicator, which refers not to enrolled students, but to the total population at the appropriate age for ESO, reduces the percentage that graduate ESO to 69.2 percent (table 2.13).

What happens before? First, a small but not unimportant percentage drops out of school before reaching 16 years of age, in other words, before the legal age permitted. The rate of enrolment at 15 years of age is only 98 percent (table 2.4),

which means that 2.1 percent of the students are missing from the schools. And, among those that have not left the system, many are repeating: by percentage for each year of ESO, 17.1 percent in the first year; 15.5 percent in the second year; 18.7 percent in the third and, 12.8 percent in the fourth (table 2.6). At 15 years of age a student should be in the fourth year of ESO but only 57.4 percent of the students in that year are that age (table 2.8). In fact, only 66.5 percent of the students of 14 years of age are in the year which corresponds to their age and, at 12 only 85.7 percent (table 2.9).

Despite a tendency for primary school not to be a focus of attention, in part because the percentages of failure in primary school are lower, but also, clearly, for the widespread inclination to make ESO into the exclusive setting for all the evils of the school system, only considering the LOGSE (Law on the General Organisation of the Educational System) or other educational reforms in general as the cause of the problems, it is clear that these problems begin in primary school, with high rates of students repeating (2.3 percent repeating in the first cycle of primary school, 2.5 percent in the second cycle and 3.5 percent in the third (table 2.2) – though in reality these percentage should be doubled, as they have been calculated based on those who repeat in the second year of each two year cycle (in the first year of a cycle students cannot repeat) over the total number of students in the two years of the cycle). The percentage of students that are at the "appropriate age" at each level declines as students repeat, thus falling to 94.5 percent at 8 years of age and 90 percent at ten years of age (graph 2.3).

In short, the process leading to the final division between those that end up completing a post compulsory educational diploma or certificate and those that do not, between remaining in the system or dropping out, between success or failure, can be broken down over time into a sequence of obstacles and minor educational deficits. What at the end we record as the final failure or abandonment of the educational system is formed by or preceded by another series of fractures, whether definitive or provisional.

6.2. Social divisions and failure: class, ethnicity and gender

Failure at school, in any of its forms or to any degree, is not neutral or impartial in relation to social inequalities. In particular, and as we have seen in chapter 3,

it is noticeably influenced by class, gender and ethnic divisions. We will not return here to the most obvious and general details already discussed, but it is worth it to focus on certain aspects that are unexpected or that do not form a part of common knowledge or the usual criticisms.

We begin with social class. The school has been suspected for a long time of being at the service of the capitalist class. If we live in a capitalist society, if capital is the most powerful economic force, if – as Marx wrote – *The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production*, then it is logical to deduce that the school would be at the service of this class,[2] and would be in two ways: first, overall, in carrying out functions useful to capital and capitalism (training a labour force, reproducing the division of labour, reducing the cost of labour for the employees, legitimating the social order, co-opting the best elements of the popular classes, etc.), an aspect that we can dispense with in analyzing failure, and secondly, individually, in situating the children of the capitalist class in an advantageous position before the school systems' requirements and selection mechanisms, assuring their success in school, opening doors to the best social opportunities for them and in this way legitimizing their social privileges to themselves and to the rest of society. This is the aspect upon which we must now focus our attention, because the surprise, at least relatively, is that those in the most advantageous position are not the children of the capitalist class, even less so those of the general owning class, although they are not in a bad position and can better afford failure than others as they have the means to counteract its effects if necessary.

Those who start out from a privileged position are, we might say, the children of the *educated classes*, first those of the *professional-managerial class* (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich, 1971) and secondly, those of the *functional middle class* or the *service class*. The first make up a highly educated minority which occupies the liberal and bureaucratic professions, and the top of hierarchical organizations, both public and private. This situation is such because professional groups have managed to monopolize the demand for these services, in among other ways, through the demand for academic credentials which are scarce because of the investment involved, because the complexity of organization, particularly in the

(2) Two major studies regarding this which had a great impact at the time of their publication were those of Baudelot and Establet (1976) and Bowles and Gintes (1976).

knowledge society, requires a qualified or educated management and because our societies have eliminated the buying and transferring of offices; this practice having ceased first and completely in public organizations, and subsequently, in a good part of private ones. In fact, the knowledge society promotes a constant permeability between the professional sector and the management sector unlike in industrial society between management and ownership, which allows us to speak of this totality as a single social class.

Thus, the school is – as many have said and continue to say – an instrument of capital, but not of *economic* capital, but rather of *cultural*, *educational* capital. An obligatory conclusion on the part of the social sciences but also one of common sense, as what else could be expected other than the success in school of those that bring educational capital with them from home. This educational or cultural capital, that some families possess and others do not, is probably as unevenly and unjustly distributed as economic (property) or organizational (authority) capital, with the added problem that when one does not possesses it one cannot transmit it, but nor can one guarantee its transmission when it is possessed: hence, school failure reaches, although to only a small degree, the middle and educated classes. This fact, on the one hand, facilitates the conversion of failure into a public problem, whose importance grows the more demanding is the knowledge society and the greater is the delegitimization of school learning as a means to access the knowledge (of all types) necessary to function in society; and, on the other hand, it grants a meritocratic patina, as it is not a privilege that can be wholly transferred voluntarily. In any case, its possession is not a mere consequence of the possession of economic capital; it is not a mere epiphenomenon nor a mere legitimization of economic capital, rather it has its own dynamic, constrained by its own specific characteristics (different forms of acquisition, of accumulation, of valorisation, of transmission and deterioration) and shaped by certain rules of the game, in part shared and in part the product of a balance between the forces involved and their strategies.[3]

The pattern of failure and abandonment of school by Gypsies merits a separate analysis. We know from diverse studies, though never exact in their data as there is no existing ethnic census of students, that their educational levels have significantly improved in quantitative terms, their participation being notable

(3) A thesis which was certainly defended by Lerena (1976), although using different terminology and without receiving the attention it merited.

in pre-school education, universal in primary school, massive in the first cycle of ESO, with a majority continuing in the second cycle, a minority in post compulsory education and, even, a small proportion in the university (ASGG, 2001; FSG, 2006). But it is characteristic that the great majority do not pass ESO and that they make up the majority of students that drop out during the first cycle. This group has gone from a situation in which, we might say, it was enrolled in school based on its willingness to be there, or at least its acquiescence to it, to one in which schooling has been imposed until 16 years of age by law and by its requirement as a condition to access certain social benefits, income subsidies, housing opportunities, etc. Staying longer in school worsens the relationship members of this group have with the teachers and with the institution: the result is high levels of absenteeism, high rates of failure and early dropping out (Fernández Enguita, 1999).

An indirect effect of this is that, if before they could drop out voluntarily, just when the conflict between their idiosyncrasy and the institution reached a certain intensity, now, obligated to remain in school, they must go through experiences which are harmful to their self-esteem and which push them toward actions that result in the reinforcement of negative stereotypes regarding their character, culture and customs. In efforts to treat them as formally equal to everyone else, in other words, by imposing on them the same conditions, in a certain way they are being stigmatized: *if they don't integrate it's because they don't want to, as they have no lack of opportunities to do so*. If we maintain this path, the combined pressure of educational administrations, social services, housing policies and the deterioration of their older ways of life will lead to, perhaps in two or three generations, the whole group staying in school at least for the compulsory period, and then we will be able to refer to this as a success story, and as the saying goes *all's well that ends well*. However the question is if there is not another option other than making them go through this mix of forced internment and predictable failure. Everything seems to indicate that the focus of educational policy aimed at Gypsies is very far from capturing the special nature of their rejection of school, and that apparent formal success has an unreasonable cost.

Regarding immigrants, the results indicate that they will be the future minorities. Although we do not have enough data to provide details based on different countries or regions of origin, we do know from causal evidence and evidence

accumulated in countries with greater traditions as receptors of immigrants that each minority is a specific case, ranging from the most difficult cases to truly successful ones, although numerically the first have greater weight than the second. Here we find systematically inferior results associated with the condition of being a non-citizen or with the use in the home of a non-native language, as is predictable. However, the differences are not so great, and for this reason it is worrying, that the expectations of second generation immigrant students are significantly lower than those of recently arrived immigrants, as if they have accepted their transformation *from immigrant to minorities*.

A very different story is found along the gender divide. Girls get better results for all the indicators (age appropriateness, repetitions, qualifications, permanency, promotion and completion) and at all educational levels. Only in certain minority sectors does their schooling still face restrictions, such as when Muslim families or more traditional Gypsies remove them from school when they begin to menstruate or so that they do not share a classroom with boys. In the absence of such atavistic customs girls widely surpass boys (Fernández Enguita, 2007b). Attempts have been made to explain this academic superiority of girls as the result of the faster rate of their maturation, an intelligence better adapted to schooling (for example, see Alexopoulos, 1996), a better verbal aptitude (for example, Colom and García-López, 2002), a higher capacity for work (Li, 2006), a greater disposition for conformism faced with school norms and discipline (Simmons and Blyth, 1987), a greater expressive and instrumental identification with the institution (Fernández Enguita, 2003), better non-cognitive skills (Jacob, 2002), a compensatory strategy for the labour market (Goldin *et al*., 2006) and as a matrimonial strategy (DiPrete and Buchman, 2004). Although there are motives to celebrate the advances made by women, there are also reasons to be concerned about the regression of men. In our data, boys appear as more detached from the demands of schooling and more attracted by the labour market, but nothing indicates if this is a cause, an effect or both. In fact, this situation has led to widespread public concern not only in Spain (Bischoping and Bell, 1998) and has begun to provoke debate about a possible separation of the sexes at these ages – as, incidentally, also happened when some feminist groups saw that as a possible manner to promote the academic achievement of girls. In any case, it is raising questions about the possible existence of factors, mechanisms, processes and social agents in the educational system that could be

negatively affecting male students (Hoff Sommers, 2000), questions that collide with political correctness but which cannot be neglected or ignored.

It is worth investigating whether there is something happening in the school system which is negatively affecting male students, independent of their cognitive abilities and their academic work. The fact that female academic superiority is greater the more patriarchal is the group culture requires some analysis. Female students surpass male students almost everywhere, but in Spain the differences are greater than in the United Kingdom, and within Spain the differences are greater among students of Moroccan origin than among native students (Colectivo Ioé, 2002) and among Gypsies greater than among non-Gypsies (Fernández Enguita, 2007b). This differential in the advantage of girls over boys may be due to the fact that precisely in more patriarchal cultures, women have more to gain from education, or that the school is, to a greater degree, the only place that offers girls the possibility of improving their status, but also, essentially, because the school culture increasingly and more openly conflicts with traditional masculine values. This is consistent with the fact that *all men are equal, but some are more equal than others*; in other words, that all end up harmed but particularly those that come from more traditional cultural environments, because, after all, the disappearance of many of the differences which articulated gender roles in the cultures mentioned is just a matter of time: Spain is, in many aspects, the past of the United Kingdom, as the Gypsies are in relation to non-Gypsies, etc. This difference is also a response to the extensive and intensive feminization of the teaching staff and its undeniable effect on teaching methods, learning, the organization of the classroom, evaluation, etc., and on the model of the good student which could be converting over time into a model of the good student as being based on the female student.

It is interesting to take note of some lesser but relevant phenomena in the articulation of these different social fractures. One already well known is the overlap between ethnicity and class, which means that a part of the disadvantage minorities suffer from is simply associated with their social class, although there is another part which specifically derives from ethnicity or being a non-citizen, which tend to go together but are distinct, as the first is a cultural condition and the second is political.

Another less known factor has to do with the relationship between class and gender: we have been assuming that girls do as well or better than their male

classmates in school, but this is more typical among middle-class students than working class students, as suggested by the literature on education and class and, according to our data, by the fact that differences by sex in indicators of success or failure are much lower among students in private schools than in public schools.

Finally, in the articulation of ethnicity and gender the opposite must be emphasized: it seems that the greater patriarchal intensity of a culture translates into better educational performance among girls in relation to boys – as long as restrictions on girls are relaxed, of course. It is clear that the few cases of educational success among Gypsies are the achievements of girls, not boys, and some data, although still not enough, points to the same situation among the population of Moroccan origin, which, given its paradoxical character, would have to be explained as part of a reactive strategy among women in these groups.

Lastly, we should take note of the effect of another social condition: *family rupture*. Unfortunately, our data only permits us, strictly, to say that all family forms different from the nuclear family are associated with worse school results according to any of the indicators we have looked at. But we also know that these other types of families are not the result of an original choice (single mothers or fathers who, in some cases, could get together and form two-couple homes, each bringing their own children) but of more or less prolonged and conflictive ruptures of conventional families. Thus, this fact does not tell us anything regarding the intrinsic value of the different classes of family, but does say something about the costs of family instability on the children, at least when they are young or adolescents.

6.3. Misunderstood problems and sterile solutions

The information obtained from the student records we examined, despite its limitations, leads us to point out (always prudently and tentatively) that certain promised solutions do not seem to be so and certain problems commonly pointed out may be poorly understood, being based on erroneous assumptions.

One solution of doubtful functioning that we are referring to is that formed by guidance and diversification programmes. Diversification has practically become a mantra for our educational policy, given the dominant proposition of

achieving equal or similar results from different starting points; while guidance – perhaps the measure which stands out the most from the 1990s – would be the prior step necessary for its successful achievement. However, what we find is, first, that students that are the object of diversification measures continue to be at great risk of failure. This may mean that the diagnosis is correct but the treatment is not, which saves the guidance counsellors but not the teachers. Or it can mean that the diagnosis is a self-fulfilling prophecy, a mere form of labelling that triggers undesired effects instead of preventing them; a harmful form of clinical practice. Or we could be before a purely superfluous diagnosis that simply tells us that those who are going to fail are going to fail, because it measures the same thing as any other school evaluation, a suspicion that has always fallen on intelligence tests and other psycho-pedagogical instruments.

A second solution that we find, always related with guidance, is the overwhelming inclination of adolescents to do the baccalaureate after ESO: three fourths of students that continue, in contrast to only one fourth that opt for intermediate vocational training. We consider the number of students that do the baccalaureate to be excessive; it reveals a certain long existing tradition of disdain for vocational training, perhaps appropriate in a country of gentlemen, but not one with our occupational structure. If we look at students' subsequent trajectories, the ETEFIL shows us that for each 100 students that finished ESO in 2001, 73 had entered the baccalaureate and of these after four years 44 entered university and 12 intermediate vocational training, while among the 18 remaining, 3 eventually entered vocational training after initially dismissing this option, 3 did not finish the baccalaureate and 12 did not continue their studies after completing the baccalaureate. Again, the guidance received did not work, given the imbalance in favour of academic studies and the quantity of students that follow the path of the baccalaureate but once finished do not go on to university or to vocational training. One wonders whether this might not be the result of the psychologization of the educational and vocational guidance provided, a mix of the normalization and cataloguing of students that is not beneficial to their academic trajectories and does not correspond with the world outside of school, particularly the labour market.

The problem, probably poorly formulated, is that of the importance of the family in school failure. We are not referring here to the weight of cultural capital, the knowledge of the educational dynamic, economic resources or educational

expectations, which are beyond doubt, but rather to the idea that the seriousness of failure, the risk of dropping out, the rejection of school or poor performance in school are due to the lack of attention the families give to education and their lack of collaboration with the school and the teachers. According to this perspective, these families do not support the school; they align themselves with the adolescents against the teachers, etc. If this were true, we would see it particularly in the case of students that have disciplinary problems, but what our examination of student records shows us is that the families of these students are more diligent than other families in responding to communications from the schools. It is possible that they respond simply because they have no other choice, but even so, this is not the image of families cut off from, opposed or indifferent to school. We must mention something else that should not go unnoticed: serious problems of discipline do not appear to have antecedents, according to the records, in previous problems of a less serious nature; this defies logic and experience and leads one to think that it is not that there were no previous problems, but that they were being ignored. In other words, discipline was neglected by the school until it became a serious problem.

The testimony of the students referred again and again to families that pressured them to study, while they were pushed in the opposite direction in general by their peer group. But the peer group has its origin and its breeding ground in the school, not outside of it, often being the only reason students that are likely to drop out find for staying in school. Anti-school attitudes then, except perhaps for certain specific groups which are culturally very distant from the mainstream, do not have their origin in the family, but rather in the school, where neglect on the part of the institution joins with the self-sustaining dynamic of adolescent peer groups; this situation favouring the conversion of occasional behaviour into systematic strategies of rejection.

6.4. Perverse effects and dead-ends

If certain aspects of the problems we see have their origin outside of the school, whether it be the general social evolution or the specific circumstances of the student's environment or personal situation, others are specifically related to the school. Among these must be considered the repetition of school years, the

transition and change from primary school to secondary school, the ambivalent nature of diversification and the lack of continuity in vocational training.

Does repeating a school year make sense? For some students certainly, otherwise the fact that in primary school or in ESO students can be promoted with various failed subjects would not have caused such a stir. Focus carefully on the background and the form this issue takes: the reason for the controversy is that the student does not have to repeat a year for having failed one or a minimum number of subjects. In contrast, no one is surprised because he or she has to repeat a whole year having passed one or a majority of subjects. This asymmetry defies any rational measure based on improving effectiveness, efficiency or fairness, and can only be understood as a case of mental inertia from the perspective of punishment. It is similar to when a father tells his son that he has not knocked on the door, that he has not greeted him before entering or that he has not closed the door properly, saying «Go out and come in again», with the express aim that the whole process be repeated, not only that aspect which was done incorrectly. There is wide evidence that repeating makes little (Jimerson *et al*., 1997) or no sense (Holmes, 1989; Paul and Troncin, 2004), but here no one seems to notice.

It is difficult to be surprised that students obligated to repeat end up with much more radical attitudes of disaffection and rejection toward school, or that such attitudes are generated if they had not existed before. First, the student feels rejected and stigmatized; secondly, not only does the student have to repeat that which he/she failed but also everything that was successfully done before, which is generally the major part of the work; thirdly, the student is separated from his or her classmates and, possibly, from the teachers with whom he or she would have continued in other circumstances; fourth, the student finds him or herself placed in a classroom with younger students, which surely involves a rupture and a gap at ages which are characterized by a rapid pace of development; fifth, the student's new classmates are also presumably more capable (at least at that moment), but as they are also younger, everything leads the student to impose the hierarchy of age and experience over academic achievement and the school, which ostensibly works against the repeating student.

As with absenteeism, repeating can be considered a great predictor and a cause of dropping out. This is what is suggested by our data and by the international academic literature (see, for example, Rumberger, 1995). A comparison between

Spain's autonomous communities reveals a direct linear relation between repeating and dropping out (CES, 2009: 25). The paradox is that some studies point to initially being a younger student in class as a factor in dropping out. According to a French study, students born in December are three times as likely as those born in January of the same year to be behind one or two years by the time they get to the last year of primary school (Ferrier, 2003); in contrast, our results show that each additional month of age increases the likelihood of dropping out. But the contradiction is only apparent: the French study refers to the initial years of schooling and reflects the greater difficulty of the school curriculum for younger students when small differences in age represent notable differences in maturity and prior learning, whether referring to school or not. Our data refers to older students, in fact to those that are already behind and at an age in which it is possible to drop out of the system legally. There is no contradiction: younger age means less development, and this is noticeable particularly at the beginning of schooling, and being older means greater frustration in regards to the institution, and this becomes more patent at the end of schooling. The common denominator is evident: the inability of the school to deal with even the most elementary form of diversity, that which separates students by the mere passage of time as if they were clones. Or better said: the inability to respond adequately; in other words, the lack of capacity to compensate for small differences in age due to the students being born at different times during the calendar year, and the tendency to respond in an excessive manner to learning difficulties (students repeating in the interest of the homogeneity of the group not the development of the student). What's more, a brief review of school systems reveals that recourse to repeating is not universal: it has become a national problem in France, Spain and Portugal; is rare or exceptional in the Nordic countries, the UK and Ireland, and very limited in the rest of Europe (Eurydice, 2005).

If the recourse to repetition is the child of traditional education (it has been referred to as the French disease by our neighbours and is contagious), other perverse effects are the children of recent reforms. One that has not been given any attention is the brusque passage from primary education to compulsory secondary education. The change in schools has always been and will be an educational problem: this is well understood in private schools and in the families that choose them, offering a way of avoiding this problem. This was debated in-depth, for example, during the long comprehensive educational reform in the

United Kingdom, where a range of formulas which took into account whether secondary schooling would take place in one or more schools between the ages of 12 and 18 were proposed (Fernández Enguita, 1986). In Spain it has meant structuring ESO using the modes and manners of the baccalaureate, which is not exactly an example of attention being given to the needs of the student.

To begin with, the student goes from depending fundamentally on one primary teacher, although not the only one (the so-called form teacher, and it is already a bad sign that this teacher has to be referred to in this way as a reminder that his/her role is not just that of teaching), with whom the student has had a global, multifaceted relationship and without a doubt with an affective component, to depending on almost a dozen different teachers, all dedicated to their subjects and with their own criteria. This means, first, the loss of the singularity of the teacher, substituted now by a segmented group of teachers; secondly, the substitution of a unified criteria (whether good or bad), which involved the pre-eminence of the form teacher, for dispersion and inconsistency because of the juxtaposition of the different criteria used by the teachers without any imposed coordination. Regarding the function of guidance, provided before by the form teacher, its «disembodiment», product of the substitution of one principal teacher for many, must be made up for by the guidance department, but it is well-known that this does not function as it should. The lack of consistent criteria also discredits the adults in the eyes of the students, which impacts negatively on the students and the school.

At the same time, the general allocation of ESO to high schools (in the public sector) has meant the imposition across Spain of the *compressed day*, in other words, from morning through mid-day, a clear example of the intensification of the student's day in the interest of reducing the teacher's work day. Whether they have difficulties or not being in school so many consecutive hours, whether they can participate or not in other educational activities in the afternoon, the majority of students in ESO in Spain, unless their parents have opted to place them in private schools, have been forced to follow a timetable that older students in the baccalaureate or vocational training find difficult to follow. At the same time, they are now dependent on a teaching staff with greater education in their disciplines but with little pedagogical education, the majority imbued with a selective and meritocratic vision of the school system which is not well matched with the universalization of this compulsory stage.

In fact, the comments of the students we have interviewed reveal agreement that the passage from primary to ESO is a difficult leap for all, being for many traumatic and for some the beginning of the end.

Within a context in which secondary teachers lack pedagogical training and the assumption is made that the students of today (now comprising the total teen population) behave as did those of yesteryear (who were a smaller segment of the population and in addition were self and hetero-selected), an additional consequence of the minute division of school work by subjects is that the teacher does not feel obligated to take responsibility for anything other than his or her subject. A general abdication of the adult function of providing guidance to student results, students that are still adolescents and not adults and still in need of supervision, with the resulting abandonment of «non-educational» spaces and times, which as a result become *disorderly*: playgrounds, hallways, lunchrooms, breaks between classes, recreational time, entering and leaving, etc. This is what students express over and over when they state that «what was most different about ESO was seeing how the teachers ignore the students».

Another perverse effect of the comprehensive educational reforms in Spain has been, without a doubt, the transformation of the vocational training path into a dead-end, an unprofitable option. The reform of secondary education in the 1980s, which led to the LOGSE (Law on the General Organization of the Educational System), was carried out among other things, or perhaps fundamentally, to end the problem of dual certificates at the end of Basic General Education (EGB). At that time vocational training was the only path available for those that did obtain the certificate of basic education; it was *the path of the failures*. With the aim of increasing its *prestige*, the thought was that access would only come through finishing basic general education: from the ESO certificate to intermediate vocational training and from the baccalaureate to advanced vocational training. In other words, the door between the lower level and the higher level was closed and those who had not completed ESO could not enter the lower level.

Thus, we have the paradox that our educational system sends off a third of the future labour force (the 30 percent that does not graduate from ESO, or the 34 percent that does not accede to post compulsory education) into the labour market without any skills. With the intention of making vocational training more prestigious, access to it was closed to those that did not obtain the certificate of completion of compulsory education. The result of this measure is that

today more students than ever are leaving the educational system without any qualifications for any jobs, despite having gone through what is now a longer academic educational process, at least measured in years. We cannot explain why there cannot be a parallel track for these students that would permit a continuing vocational training, although it would not be the equivalent of the intermediate or advanced cycles of vocational training that currently exist.

In addition, the fact that one cannot accede directly to the advanced cycles after completing intermediate vocational training has the indirect effect of discrediting the lower cycles, as they are in principle a shortcut but one without a future; summing up: inflate enrolment in the baccalaureate and close the door to those who, with the passage of time and personal maturation, will come to understand the value of education later. The baccalaureate, in addition, was never an integral or multilateral cycle, in other words, it was never not unilaterally focused on the university and there is a reason that the use of the adjective *versatile* to describe it has been abandoned.

Lastly, the frustrated promise of diversification must be mentioned. The bad conscience of the educational institution for treating all the students in a standardized manner is not new, as it was already present in the proposal (the General Education Act and its regulatory development) for an individualized education that never came to anything. But it was the LOGSE which brought us the mantra of diversification, in part as a necessary recognition of reality but also as a way of satisfying different opinions for and against the reform.

The problem is that the catchword diversification does not seem to have resulted in much more than a few minor achievements along with a number of disadvantages. Regarding its strengths, there has been the limited success of Social Guarantee courses among a sector of the students. Regarding its weaknesses, there is the relative stigma that accompanies these courses, and even more those of compensatory education, and the belief among the majority of students that with these groups and diversification measures more is lost than gained, either because of institutional expectations or because of the *bad company* found in these groups. In general, the student does not see diversification as an additional aid nor much less as a special effort on the part of the school, rather it is seen as a rejection of the student. And although teachers demand greater diversification measures, everything indicates that they are thinking in terms of differentiating the objectives pursued with the students, including, of

course, compulsory education, and not in diversifying the means and resources for reaching the same objectives.

6.5. Indifference and disengagement

Dichotomies of the type success or failure, completion or abandonment and others similar to those that we are now so habituated to, have the virtue of simplifying things and establishing possibilities for comparisons in space and time: failure increases or declines, it is higher in the north or in the south, it affects this group more than that one, etc. These are not simply imaginary dichotomies but very real, as they are identified with gateways to further studies, to certain jobs or to other opportunities in adult life that are not guaranteed but which can be achieved through effective action.

As we explained in the first chapter, these forms of binary opposites do not reflect the continuous distribution of performance or permanency in the school system. Nor is the dichotomy of success and failure able to capture the enormous variety of learning and results, nor the numerical scores; nor is the dichotomy of abandonment-permanency able to adequately express the causes for which students leave school, and much less the wide range of attitudes of attachment or indifference on the part of students toward school. This is precisely the greatest problem that we find in our view of the situation and it is worth repeating: the fixation on the extreme manifestations of the failure to complete the systems programme – school failure and dropping out – and the consequent reclassification of everyone else as success or permanency, can easily lead to ignoring a more profound and omnipresent reality: the growing sense of separation from the institution of education.

All this makes one think that we are not before two types of students: one of them made to measure for the institution and the other with problems – something that is too much of a reminder of the distinction between the good and bad student –, but rather, we are before an essential phenomenon which affects all students, although to differing degrees of intensity, in diverse ways and with different results. We are referring to the problem of the generalized *disengagement* of adolescents from the educational system. This disconnection should not be conceived in binary terms (is or is not, success or failure, love or hate), but as something continuous, perhaps black and white at the extremes

(based on which extreme you look at) but characterized, above all, by the profusion of greys between them. Along with the highest and lowest scores, even between passing and failing, are the difficulties in passing, the oscillations, the calculations of minimums and trajectories on the edge; and then between remaining in school and dropping out is absenteeism in all of its degrees and forms; and between conformity with the demands of the institution and failure or rejection are all degrees and manners of disconnection or separation. This is a multifaceted phenomenon over which there is no terminological consensus, for this reason researchers talk about demobilization (Ballion, 1995), disconnection (Glasman, 2000), disengagement (Rumberger, 2001), virtual absenteeism (García Gracia, 2001) and internal absenteeism (Blaya, 2003), non-affiliation (Coulon, 1993), non-belonging (Charlot *et al*., 1992) etc.

It must be said that education represents something secondary in the life of adolescents and young people, something very distinct from what the advent of the information society demands and from what families that support the education of their children as the first and primary instrument for conquering or conserving a desirable social status hope for. Youth Surveys [*Encuestas Juventud*] in Spain reveal, for example, that studying is one of the minor issues in the life of young people, very important for only 40 percent, significantly behind the family (81 percent), health (75 percent), friendship (63 percent), work (58 percent), money (49 percent) and leisure (47 percent), and on a par with sexuality (40 percent) and ahead of religion (8 percent) and politics (7 percent) (INJUVE, 2008: 24). So great is its lack of legitimacy that it heads the list of institutions whose norms can be violated, so that cheating on exams and in competitions is better seen than getting drunk in public, not paying on public transport, keeping neighbours from sleeping, stealing in department stores, exploiting immigrants, having a conflict with the police or damaging public property (ibid; 29).

The simultaneous loss of instrumental and expressive value is the basis of this generalized disengagement. The first more apparent than real and the second more real than apparent, but both with importance in the attitudes of the students. On the one hand, the promise of social mobility in exchange for conforming to the educational system has collapsed, as the correspondence between the diploma and work has not been maintained, leaving the student to ask if the effort required is worth it (Glasman, 2000; Elliot, 1998). On the other hand,

the decline in the diversity and wealth of knowledge in schools, now available in so many different media and formats, and the austerity, rigidity and sterility of school subjects converts the institution and the schooling experience into something very boring, which ends up becoming its principal and omnipresent facet (Moncada, 1985; Finn, 1989; Newman, 1992).

We might suggest the hypothesis that underestimation of the instrumental value of education will be more common among students from the popular classes, less familiar with the real and particular value of academic degrees in the labour market, more vulnerable to sensationalist information and more inclined to impressionistic reactions and to compositional effects, in particular to the idea that degrees have no value, because they do not guarantee one a good job or any job, and therefore to rationalizing their failure or dropping out of the educational system (something which is always confirmed in the interviews).

In contrast, the loss of expressive value would probably be produced among middle class students, more familiar with the opportunities provided by information and culture through other means and, therefore, better situated to question and relativise the value of schooling. To a certain degree, the student from the popular classes is lucky to be able to find in his/her social environment, community and surely family, the values, meanings, symbols and norms necessary to elaborate a culture and support for an anti-school attitude: the affirmation of manual work and the disparagement of the intellectual; the cult of different forms of *physicality* (strength among men, sensuality and reproduction among women); the solidarity of the group over the individual path (Willis, 1978; Grignon, 1971). The middle class student, in contrast, will find him/herself alone before this disengagement, as his or her social class, community, culture, family and peer group still provide pressure in favour of the institution (Fernández Enguita, 1988), hence, the most likely formula for disengagement of this student is purely individual, the *internal absenteeism* that we referred to before. And, if it is like this, everything indicates that an increasingly mesocratic society will, as a consequence, have an unsuspected expansion of this type of disengagement.

In short, everything leads to the idea that if dropping out of school is not greater, it is more because of external pressure and the lack of options outside of school than for any intrinsic attraction the school has. The red line that separates success from failure and staying in school from dropping out is much thinner

and more ductile than we like to believe. A good indication of this is that those who leave school do not recommend it and those who stay do not celebrate it. In the interviews we saw again and again that those that drop out believe they have done something logical and justified, although they do not believe they have done anything beneficial for themselves nor would they suggest that others do it. Rather just the opposite, and in general they have plans to return, or to access some type of studies or training, although, in reality, the majority will not do so. Regarding those that stay in school, they do not see themselves nor are they seen as better for this, instead, they are often seen as passive, immature, etc.

Ultimately, we can think of de-schooling as a form of migration, from school to work, and as with all forms of migration it has two sides: *push and pull*, that which pushes you from your place of origin and that which attracts you to your place of destiny. When the attraction of the destiny increases, as happens in areas with a lot of tourist activity, the movement intensifies. What makes the Balearic Islands or the Community of Valencia privileged settings for failure and dropping out is not, then, the lower quality of their schools, but the better or seemingly better opportunities outside of school. Family expectations, social group pressure, and other factors intervene in the opposite sense. However, if the flow depends on the *pull*, on the external attraction, it is because the *push*, the internal repulsion, can be assumed, and this despite the centripetal force which, independent of the institution, the peer group exercises within, as students in general and those that drop out in particular do not get tired of saying that the best or the only thing that makes school worthwhile for them is precisely this: friends. The institution must, without a doubt, take a look at itself and stop comforting itself with the assumption that all that is wrong comes from outside.

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Appendix: Sources of data

ETEFIL and PISA

ETEFIL

The Survey on the Transition from Education/Training to Labour Market Insertion (ETEFIL) was carried out in 2005 to analyze the paths of different groups exiting from the educational system during the 2000-2001 academic year. It is a survey with a retrospective intention and, therefore, it has the advantages and disadvantages of this type of information source. Its design is somewhat complex, as it consists of 11 samples carried out separately for the different groups that were selected in the design of the study. In this study we have used two: those that finished ESO in the year sited and those that dropped out of it during that year. Note that these samples are not the same, as in one of them the event which defines the sample has to do with one age cohort and those from previous cohorts that were behind in their studies, and in the other, dropping out of ESO constitutes a flow that affects that cohort and the following ones.

The data from the ETEFIL permits us to examine with certain detail and with some serious limitations the trajectories and motivations of two distinct groups that leave school early: the pure failures that drop out of the educational system before finishing ESO and those that finish but do not continue to any subsequent level. The interest in this information resides, first, in the tracking made of the trajectory of the students that drop out of the system during the four years after the completion – or lack of completion – of a cycle and, secondly because the survey combines information about the motivations for dropping out and attitudes toward work with objective information about the students' activities after the end of the corresponding cycle.

However, the limitations of the data are certainly important and must be taken into account in interpreting them. The first of them is that the data refer to individuals that completed a cycle (with good or bad results) in 2001, and to their subsequent tracking in the following four years. This means that the portrait of attitudes and motivations that it offers us correspond to the 2000-2001 school year, a period coinciding with the full implementation of the LOGSE system but one that is not current. The information about the numbers of individuals in each state is, therefore, punctual and refers to a period that is now somewhat distant in time. Secondly, the sample design of the ETEFIL is organized to study different groups of students separately, which complicates overall analysis and does not permit us to draw conclusions about the totality of the cohort, as the selection criteria for each of the 11 independent samples are in fact different.

The most serious problem in our case is that we have a sample of students that finish ESO, and another sample with students that do not finish ESO in the year for which the information is gathered. As we have said, while the first group constitutes a cohort, that which finishes ESO in the year 2000-2001, the second group does not. The fact of dropping out in that year (which is what defines the second sample) does not constitute an occurrence which brings together this disparate group of students in other than a nominal manner; therefore, there is no period effect that can be interpreted as such. Thus, mixing one sample with the other to analyze them together is, from a methodological perspective, of doubtful validity.

Third, the ETEFIL questionnaire lacks certain information that would have been extremely important in analyzing drop outs. First, is a reliable indicator for social origin, a factor recognized as of extreme importance in analyzing the drop out process, as well as other educational processes. It must be pointed out that this absence is not justified by the fact that the survey was aimed at the analysis of processes of labour market integration, as the social origin of young people has a specific explanatory importance in these processes. Second, is the existence of indicators regarding minimal educational competencies: repetitions of academic years, grades, absenteeism or infringements of discipline. Therefore, in this study we have used the ETEFIL to carry out a type of analysis for which it was not designed. Despite these problems, we have been able to extract certain interesting conclusions.

PISA

The well known PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) studies consist in tests of competencies given to samples of students of 15 years of age in OECD countries and other invited countries in three fields: reading, mathematics and science. In addition to the information regarding the intellectual skills of the students, they contain a lot of information of interest about the organization of schools, the conditions in which education is imparted, the aspirations and perceptions of the students themselves and the educational strategies of the teachers. They constitute a rich and diverse source of information about the state of the educational system, and specifically secondary education, going well beyond what we normally see published in the media regarding the PISA, which is generally limited to data regarding students' average scores.

In this study we have opted to use the 2003 PISA data for Spain, as it includes information about the expectations of the students regarding their own educations not included in more recent rounds of the study. To find current information about the PISA study the official webpage of the OECD can be consulted at, http://path.to/ocde.

Student records

We have developed a database of student records in which we have gathered academic, disciplinary and guidance information corresponding to students that dropped out of school before obtaining a post compulsory educational certificate during the academic year prior to the carrying out of our field work (school year 2007-2008). This database includes cases of students that dropped out of school without obtaining a certificate or diploma in any year in ESO, intermediate vocational training, the baccalaureate or in Social Guarantee Programmes.

To create this database we got in contact with 66 schools that impart Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO), 38 of which were public schools and 28 private. These schools are located in 15 different municipalities, 5 of which are urban and 10 of which are rural, pertaining to the autonomous communities of Madrid and Castilla and Leon. Given the scope and length of this study on the one hand, and the diversity of government registries in each autonomous community and even for provincial use on the other, we opted for limiting our database to this

territorial sphere. 47 schools permitted us access to the information solicited and 19 rejected collaborating with us. Of those that agreed to collaborate, 12 (all private schools) had no cases of students dropping out without obtaining a certificate or diploma in the year referred to. Thus, our database includes data from student records from 35 schools. Of these 27 are public and 8 are private, 23 are urban (from 5 different municipalities) and 12 are rural (from 6 municipalities).

With the information supplied by these 35 schools we obtained the records of 856 students that dropped out of school prematurely during the 2007-2008 school year. In table A.1 the distribution based on whether the schools were public or private and located in urban or rural areas is presented.

TABLE A.1

Cases from the sample by geographic location and whether from public or private schools

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION	PUBLIC OR PRIVATE		
	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	TOTAL
Urban	690	10	700
Rural	151	5	156
Total	**841**	**15**	**856**

Source: elaborated by author.

It should be pointed out that we have included in our sample students that dropped out after having returned to their studies, either through adult education for the completion of ESO (177 cases), or through distance learning programmes for the baccalaureate (47 cases). All these cases, both those of adult education and those of distance learning pertain to the same school.

Lastly, the important differences in the number of cases gathered from each school must be pointed out. Leaving aside distance learning and adult education, the number of dropouts found in each school ranges from 1 to 67.

Sample selection was not random but was concentrated in certain areas, and among the rural schools in one province (Salamanca) where we had the support of the Provincial Educational Administration (Dirección Provincial de Educación), which permitted us to be very thorough in our gathering of

data. The difficulty of access to information considered to be sensitive kept us from following a random sampling procedure; as a consequence, our sample is not statistically representative. However, we think that it is *typologically* representative, as we have gathered information from each one of the different types of students in sufficient numbers to permit us to analyze their academic histories. Nevertheless, we cannot present information regarding sampling errors or confidence levels.

Interviews with principals and guidance counsellors

We took advantage of our visits to the schools our sample of student records was drawn from to carry out a series of open interviews with the school principals (in all the cases) and school guidance counsellors (in some cases). In total we managed to get interviews in 26 of the 35 schools with students that dropped out, and in 2 that had no students dropping out during the school year in question. The distribution of these interviews can be seen in table A.2.

TABLE A.2

Interviews carried out in the schools, by geographic location and whether public or private

	PUBLIC		PRIVATE		
	PRINCIPAL	PRINCIPAL AND GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR	PRINCIPAL	PRINCIPAL AND GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR	TOTAL
Urban	12	3	3	1	19
Rural	5	4		–	9
Total	**17**	**7**	**3**	**1**	**28**

Source: elaborated by author.

Being able to count on the information from the student records and on the opinion of educators in the same schools allowed us to incorporate the codified results of the interviews in our database of student records.

Interviews with adolescents that have gone through a process of school failure

In addition to the more objective information, to address the reality of failure at school we must understand how the students construct meanings around this phenomenon. We act in function not just of «objective» conditions but based on how we understand the reality that surrounds us. We need, therefore, techniques to access the way in which the process of school failure is lived from the inside.

The technique which allows us to reconstruct the individual experiences is the open interview, in which the students manifest their image of the world, but starting from their actions and the explanations and justifications given for them. These interviews, like «Ariadna's thread», guide us through a map of meanings about the way in which the students understand reality and the role that so-called school failure occupies in their lives. In our study, we have focused on the periods that the interviewees consider fundamental in their educations, and, especially those that can be considered to be connected to their failure.

To get a sense of the diversity of existing discourses, we have taken into account a series of variables that can generate different discourses about our object of study, and we have used them to create a structural design for our intentional sample. We are always referring to persons that were outside of the school system (it is our selection criteria) with, at maximum, the certificate of compulsory education, and that had recently dropped out, between 18 and 26 years of age. The variables that potentially generate differentiated discourses are:

– Gender: men and women (2 values).

– Level of education obtained: without certificate of compulsory education, with certificate but dropping out upon completion, with certificate and failure in attempts to continue (3 values).

– The group or sphere to which students belong: Gypsy, immigrant, working class, middle class, rural (5 values).

To begin, we have cross tabulated the three variables to create our sample design. In the case of two groups we decided that we had to vary this pattern to get insight into their reality and internal diversity: Gypsies and immigrants.

The Gypsies are differentiated within the group of students that drop out of school without completing ESO, in function of the academic year in which they

drop out, into two groups: those that drop out in the first cycle (1st and 2nd years of ESO) or the second cycle (3rd and 4th years of ESO. To this are added those that drop out in primary school (that do not go to high school). However, we did not include those that dropped out in post compulsory education for their small numbers within this minority.

Immigrants are differentiated within the group of students that drop out of school without completing ESO in function of their native language: Spanish or a language other than Spanish.

Based on our initial sample design, we had 36 potential interviews, of which we were able to carry out only 28. The difficulties were concentrated among women immigrants. Below, table A.3 shows the sample design and shows the cases in which no interview was carried out, the rest of the cases constitute the actual sample. The corresponding codes for each interview as cited in the text also appear. In the cases in which two numbers appear, two persons were interviewed with the same profile.

Contacts with the individuals interviewed were made through some of the schools included in the database (5 interviews), through personal contacts of the research team or persons close to the team (6 interviews), and the rest through immigrant and Gypsy associations, social action organizations, the army, churches, local council members or the owners of businesses oriented toward immigrant clientele.

TABLE A.3

Intended and conducted interviews

RURAL SPHERE (6 intended, 4 conducted)

	WITHOUT ESO CERTIFICATE	WITH CERTIFICATE FOLLOWED BY DROPPING OUT	WITH CERTIFICATE AND FAILURE IN ATTEMPT TO CONTINUE
Men	1.1	1.3 (no)	1.5 (no)
Women	1.2	1.4	1.6

URBAN MIDDLE CLASS (6 intended, 4 conducted)

	WITHOUT ESO CERTIFICATE	WITH CERTIFICATE FOLLOWED BY DROPPING OUT	WITH CERTIFICATE AND FAILURE IN ATTEMPT TO CONTINUE
Men	2.1	2.3 (no)	2.5
Women	2.2	2.4 (no)	2.6

URBAN WORKING CLASS (6 intented, 5 conducted)

	WITHOUT ESO CERTIFICATE	WITH CERTIFICATE FOLLOWED BY DROPPING OUT	WITH CERTIFICATE AND FAILURE IN ATTEMPT TO CONTINUE
Men	3.1	3.3	3.5
Women	3.2	3.4 (no)	3.6

GYPSIES (8 intended, 9 conducted)

		WITHOUT ESO CERTIFICATE	WITH CERTIFICATE FOLLOWED BY DROPPING OUT
Men	Did not begin ESO	4.1	4.7
	Dropped out and 1st cycle ESO	4.3	
	Dropped out and 2nd Cycle ESO	4.5	
Women	Did not begin ESO	4.2 and 4.9	4.8
	Dropped out 1st cycle ESO	4.4	
	Dropped out 2nd Cycle ESO	4.6	

IMMIGRANTS (10 intended, 6 conducted)

		WITHOUT ESO CERTIFICATE	WITH CERTIFICATE FOLLOWED BY DROPPING OUT	WITH CERTIFICATE AND FAILURE IN ATTEMPT TO CONTINUE
Men	Language: Spanish	5.1	5.5 (no)	5.9
	Language: other than Spanish	5.3	5.7	
Dones		5.2 (no)	5.6 (no)	5.10 and 5.11
	Language: other than Spanish	5.4 (no)	5.8 (no)	

Source: elaborated by author.

Note from the authors:

We would like to thank the following for helping us in contacting the individuals interviewed: Cáritas Salamanca, Salamanca Red Cross, Secretariado Gitano (Salamanca and Madrid), Asociación Búlgara Aibe Balkan, Salamanca Acoge, Asociación Semilla (Madrid), Asociación de Inmigrantes Hispanoamericanos (Salamanca), Asociación de Senegaleses (Salamanca), Asociación ATIME (Asociación de Trabajadores e Inmigrantes Marroquíes en España, Madrid), Federación de Asociaciones de Inmigrantes (Madrid), APLA (Amigos del Pueblo Latinoamericano), Asociación Rumiñauhi Hispanoecuatoriana (Madrid), KARIBU (Asociación de Subsaharianos), Asociación Gabriela (Búlgaros de Segovia), Asociación de Argentinos- Casa Argentina de Salamanca, Spanish Army (Salamanca, Burgos and Alicante), Santa Teresa Parish (Salamanca), the municipal government of Collado Villalba, the Madrid Ministry of Education (Consejería de Educación de Madrid), the provincial delegation of Salamanca of the Ministry of Education, the following high schools: Tierra of Ciudad Rodrigo, Las Canteras (Collado Villalba) and Universidad Laboral (Zamora), the Instituto de Iberoamérica of the University of Salamanca and the organization of the Semana Latina in Salamanca.

Glossary of terms and acronyms

ACNEE: Students with Special Educational Needs/Alumno con Necesidades Educativas Especiales.

ACS: Significant Curricular Adaptations/Adaptaciones Curriculares Significativas.

AET: Early Abandonment of Education/Abandono Educativo Temprano.

Age adequacy rate: result of the quotient between students that are enrolled in the academic year theoretically adequate for their age and the population at that age.

ANCE: Compensatory Education/Alumno con Necesidades de Compensación Educativa.

BUP: General Unified Baccalaureate/Bachillerato Unificado Polivalente. Corresponding to the regulations under the General Law on Education (LGE) in force until the LOGSE.

CDP: Curricular diversification programmes.

Certification: Document which credits student with having attended during the academic years corresponding to ESO, but without having achieved the minimum educational objectives.

COU: One year Compulsory University Orientation course. Corresponding to the regulations under the General Law on Education (LGE) in force until the LOGSE.

ESL: Early School Leaving

ISCED: *International Standard Classification of Education*. It is the norm of reference for comparing educational systems. The initial levels are: 0 pre-primary education, 1 primary education, 2 lower secondary or second stage of basic education (compulsory secondary education) 3 upper secondary education (post compulsory secondary education).

ISCED 3A and 3B: programmes at level 3, designed to provide direct access to ISCED 5A and 5B (first stage of tertiary education).

ISCED 3C: not designed to lead directly to ISCED 5A or 5B but rather directly to the labour market or to other level three programmes and to level 4 (post secondary non-tertiary education).

EGB: Basic General Education/Educación General Básica. Corresponding to the regulations under the General Law on Education (LGE) in force until the LOGSE.

ESO: Compulsory Secondary Education/Educación Secundaria Obligatoria.

ESO I C: First cycle of compulsory secondary education.

ESO II C: Second cycle of compulsory secondary education.

ETEFIL: Survey on the Transition from Education/Training to Labour Market Insertion/Encuesta de Transición Educativo-Formativa e Inserción Laboral (see the Appendix).

EU: European Union.

Gross graduation rate: Result of the quotient between the population of students that graduate from an educational programme and the total population at the theoretically ideal age for finishing said programme.

Legal age: Age at which schooling is no longer obligatory (16 years of age).

LGE: General Law on Education/Ley General de Educación, in force from 1970 until the approval of the LOGSE in 1990.

LOGSE: General Law on the Education System/Ley Orgánica de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo en España (1990-2002).

Net school enrolment rate: result of the quotient between those that are effectively in school and the total population for the corresponding age.

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

PCPI: Programmes for Initial Professional Qualification/Programas de Cualificación Profesional Inicial.

PIRLS: *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

PISA: Programme for Indicators of Student Achievement (see Appendix).

SGP: Social Guarantee Programmes.

TIMSS: *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

VT: Vocational Training.

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Mariano Fernández Enguita
Luis Mena Martínez and Jaime Riviere Gómez

(*) English version available on the internet

School failure in Spain is a well-known and much analyzed problem. This book hopes to advance our knowledge, looking at the processes that lead to students making that final decision to drop out of school prematurely and focusing its analysis on the situation, the path and the discourse of young people that are considered to be failures at school.

To do this, available data has been gathered and analyzed, looking at the influence of external factors and focusing on students' school trajectories and on how they understand their own choice to drop out of school.

This study captures the multiple dimensions necessary to explain student failure and dropping out of school, which range from the new role of education in the information society to the internal dynamics and instruments of the school system, in addition to examining major social divisions and the generalized tendency of adolescents to feel disconnected from the institution of education.

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